THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

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Join these two amazing undercover agents in the kind of wild, way-out action that made them famous!

NAPOLEON SOLO • ILLYA KURYAKIN in —

THE VOLCANO BOX AFFAIR

A Thrilling New "Man From U.N.C.L.E." Novel

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

HELLSGARDE Another "Department of Lost Stories" Masterpiece **by C.L. MOORE**

THE VOLCANO BOX AFFAIR

THE NEW COMPLETE "U.N.C.L.E." NOVEL

Deep inside the earth THRUSH had found a molten weapon to enslave mankind, as Solo and Illya, alone and marked for extermination, seek the one man who had discovered how to turn any city in the world into a red death trap.

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

ACT I—ISLAND OF THE LOST

THEY LOOKED LIKE a pair of prehistoric animals as they emerged from the testing room, but the weird beaklike noses and bug eyes were actually the components of ordinary gas masks.

They removed these and set them down on a table.

The darker and heftier of the two shook his head in wonder. "I don't see how such a tiny amount of liquid could create so much smoke. You'd think a city block were on fire."

Illya Kuryakin grinned pontifically. He said: "It's not the liquid so much as the gas it liberates, which reacts with the metals it touches and creates more gas and smoke, which in turn react with the metals they touch and create—"

"Okay. I get the picture," Napoleon Solo said, gesturing with his thumb and index finger as if to turn off a broken record. "Well, this little capsule ought to come in handy if it doesn't get us arrested for air pollution violations. In fact, I'd say it's a real gasser." He looked at Illya for approval.

"Is that really what you'd say?" the blond young man said, putting his jacket on over his snug black vest.

Napoleon's reply was interrupted by the sound of the public address system crackling: there was about to be an announcement. It turned out to be Alexander Waverly's secretary, paging Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin.

They proceeded through a labyrinth of corridors, up a silent elevator, and through another maze of passages, at each checkpoint flashing their identification, though they were well known by face to the guards. Such was the scope of security precautions in this most important law enforcement agency in the free world.

Waverly's back was turned on them when they entered his office. His suit fitted somewhat loosely on his broad shoulders. But that hunch of his back was deceptive, for he was an extremely powerful man and as quick on his feet as a man in his business had to be to survive as long as Waverly had survived.

The head of North American Operations for U.N.C.L.E. was looking at a map of the world which had pins of numerous colors jutting out of a great diversity of locations. The pins were of course coded, each color corresponding to some discernible pattern of crime or trouble around the world—light blue for smuggling, dark blue for white slavery, red for suspected sabotage, and so forth.

In his left hand he held a sheaf of bulletins, releases, newspaper and magazine clippings and data sheets, and they were color-coded dark green.

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin glanced at the map but could not at first see any pinheads corresponding to the color of Waverly's papers. Then they both noticed a lonely pair of green dots thrust into the Indonesian area, almost imperceptible, due to the company they kept—a riot of pins indicating smuggling, dope traffic, murder, espionage, sabotage, political chicanery, kidnapping, and syndicated crime corresponding to every hue in the rainbow.

Southeast Asia was about the hottest spot on the globe when it came to evil-doing, but the two green pins in the midst of all the others suggested that whatever this new form of evil was, it was only in its incipient stage.

Waverly was tapping the map with his pipe, unaware that flakes of tobacco were falling out of it and covering his arm and shoulder. Napoleon cleared his throat and Waverly dropped his arm, sending a shower of tobacco down to the carpet. He wrinkled his nose. "What is that smell?"

"Smoke, sir," Napoleon said, looking a bit sheepish. "We've been experimenting with bithane gas. Most potent *teargas* I've ever seen."

"I wish you'd have your clothing deodorized before coming into this office," Waverly said, grinning. "People will think I've been smoking some rotten weed." He dipped an almost black briar pipe into his humidor, and as he tamped tobacco into the bowl he gestured with the pipe in the direction of the map. "I expected you gentlemen know something about geology."

The agents nodded cautiously.

"You'll observe two green pins located in the Banda Sea area, southeast of the main Indonesian group. These represent the two volcanoes that have erupted there recently. Both have received ample publicity, so I don't have to fill you in on their havoc. In case you haven't followed the press releases carefully, you'll find complete descriptions in the information I'll provide you with at the end of our briefing."

He dropped a green manila folder marked *Newspaper Clippings* on his desk.

"A volcano can occur anywhere on earth. It is the result of molten lava, which presumably occupies the core of our planet, rushing to fill faults in the earth and, if that fault extends to the surface as frequently happens during an earthquake, overflowing. Because such faults exist in greater concentrations in some places on the globe than in others, we can expect more activity in those places.

"The islands around the Pacific Ocean are the most vulnerable earthquake and volcano zones, and from Hawaii to Japan such subsurface disturbances are common. Therefore it should ordinarily be of no concern to a law agency that a volcano or two erupt somewhere on earth, as obviously the only laws we cannot try to enforce are those of nature."

He patted his pockets as if looking for a match, then rummaged around the notes and papers on his desk while his pipe hung unfit from his mouth. Apparently he forgot what he was looking for a moment later, and removed the pipe from his mouth to use it simply as a visual aid in emphasizing his lecture.

"However," Waverly went on, "U.N.C.L.E. has some grounds to suspect that the two recent volcanoes, the first on an uninhabited island numbered L four hundred and six on navigation charts, the second, quite tragically, on a fairly well-populated island called Tapwana, are not acts of God, but rather acts of man. Let me modify that. The first of the two eruptions could have been natural, but the second is most suspect."

Napoleon Solo had begun frowning and looking off to an indeterminate spot in mid-air as if his mind was groping for an idea. Then his eyes seemed to catch fire, and he said "Tapwana. Isn't that the island that was making all that trouble for the Boruvian Federation?" He turned to Illya for support.

Illya Kuryakin picked up the thread immediately. "Right. That dictator of Borua—what's his name?—Sarabando—lined up all the islands in his area into a federation, but this Tapwana refused to join. A month later it was immaterial, because Tapwana was melted down into volcano-fodder. But sir, you don't think that a volcano—"

Waverly cleared his throat, as if reprimanding his agent for drawing hasty conclusions. "Sarabando, the dictator of the Boruvian Federation, is a known puppet of THRUSH, Mr. Solo. And although that still leaves considerable room for coincidence, there is one more circumstance which pushes this matter very solidly into U.N.C.L.E.'S sphere of influence."

Alexander Waverly, enjoying his moment, lingered over it by fiddling with the mouthpiece of his pipe.

"Who is Edward Dacian?" he asked, like a teacher trying to catch his pupils unprepared with a surprise test.

TWO

NAPOLEON AND ILLYA pursed their lips and for a second or two appeared to be stumped. But they were only vacating the room mentally, as it were, and sending their minds into a vast filing system of data in order to retrieve a full dossier on the man their commanding officer had mentioned.

Illya's face showed he had come back with the facts first, but Napoleon spoke. "Dr. Edward Dacian. Scientist, working at some laboratory in Texas. Oh yes, I remember. He was experimenting with the application of laser technology to mining operations." Napoleon turned to Illya for a hand. What one didn't know, the other usually did.

"It wasn't only mining," the slim blond Russian said. "It was drilling as well. He was using lasers to penetrate the earth's surface. I think an oil concern had him under contract."

Although Waverly had the information at his fingertips, he usually refrained from coaching his agents during briefing sessions. On the grounds that an agent learns to swim if the alternative is sinking, he always let his people flounder and thrash, using their memory and wits to get them out of trouble. If he gave them too many cues he would only injure them in the long run, for they would come to rely more on him than on their own resources. Thus he held his tongue as his two star agents batted Dacian's life back and forth until they got the facts straight.

"No," Napoleon Solo contradicted his companion, "it wasn't oil. I think it was—yes, it definitely was an electric power company."

Illya's normally cool facade became animated with the excitement of recognition. "Right! Now I remember. This power and light combine had set Dacian to work to drill deep into the earth's mantle with his laser instrument. As they penetrated it they'd of course approach the hot material

in the core. At a certain level the heat would be so intense it would turn water to steam. So if Dr. Dacian were to drill, say, on the ocean floor or through the bed of a big river, the hole would be perpetually filled with water, which in turn would be converted into steam, like those geysers in Yellowstone Park."

"And the company that hired Dacian saw this steam as a simple and cheap mode of energy," Napoleon added. "All they had to do was harness it to generate all the power they needed."

Waverly's bloodhound face wrinkled in the semblance of a dim smile of appreciation. "Very good, gentlemen. But there is one major fact you've been withholding."

Napoleon Solo grinned. "We've saved the best for last."

"Well, get on with it; I'm a busy man," their chief growled.

"Dacian disappeared about six months ago," Napoleon said.

The trio held silence for a few moments as the threads Waverly had been weaving came together to form a distinct and sinister pattern. It fell on Napoleon to summarize the situation.

"So you believe," he said to Waverly, "that THRUSH abducted Dacian, and somehow coerced him to create for them the device he'd been working on in Texas. And now THRUSH is using that device to blackmail governments. The first one to feel the blow was Tapwana."

"That's correct. The volcano that preceded Tapwana's, the one on that unpopulated island, was probably experimental. Having proved the device worked, they applied it to Tapwana. I don't believe that Tapwana was that vital to THRUSH politically; rather, THRUSH used the device to warn other governments of its immense power in the form of Dacian's device.

"I have no doubt that every government in the world can expect soon to hear from THRUSH with a blackmail message. The forces on our planet, as

a result of this situation, are distinctly unbalanced, and must be restored as soon as possible. So let me give you your assignments."

He turned to Napoleon first. "I would like you to proceed to Borua, the island where dictator Sarabando reigns. Fortunately for us April Dancer and Mark Slate just completed an assignment in Hong Kong three days ago. I might add it was eminently successful," Waverly said with a smile of gratification. "Mark left immediately for London, but April, after checking with me, had plans to stay on at the Hong Kong Hilton for a short rest which she highly deserved."

Waverly's expression changed suddenly. "However, before the poor girl had a chance to relax, we received the shocking news that our U.N.C.L.E. director of operations in Singapore, Harry Gray, had been mysteriously stabbed to death. This is a great loss to us, for as you two know, Gray was a key agent in our Indonesian area. And most important now, Gray had valuable in formation on the Boruvian Federation and the scientist Dr. Dacian. Because of this crisis in the Singapore headquarters, April has been ordered to go there. She's been helping Joe Kingsley, who worked under Harry Gray, and now she's investigating in Borua. She knows enough for you to proceed, I believe, in your usual sagacious manner, Mr. Solo."

Napoleon Solo gazed at Illya and smiled broadly. "I'll be looking forward to working with one of our best girl agents, April Dancer. Glad she took over for Harry."

Waverly handed a neat typewritten report to Solo. "She's informed fully about the THRUSH threat in the Boruvian Federation. Study this en route."

"Yes sir. So we are to try to track down Dr. Dacian and his machine?"

"Yes. It will be difficult and dangerous. If Dacian has been eliminated by THRUSH, get all copies of his formula, all volcano devices in existence. Concentrate, too, in discovering anyone there who knows the technique of Dr. Dacian's treacherous device. In this end, Mr. Solo, I believe luck may be with us."

"How so?"

"I don't believe Dacian has spilled the formula. If he had, we'd have gotten our blackmail notices long ago. He is obviously being coerced to make one machine at a time, and is doing so reluctantly, slowly. But THRUSH will get that formula sooner or later, and you'll have to work fast.

"Illya," he said, turning to Napoleon's colleague, "you are to proceed to Gulf Coast Power and Light laboratories in Texas. There you are to work with the officers and scientists, both to learn everything you can about the process Dacian was working on, and, if you can, about suspicious persons who might give us some clue as to Dacian's present unknown whereabouts.

"In addition, I want you to work with them to develop a device which can detect Dr. Dacian's machine from a distance and destroy it. You have Gulf Coast's promise of full cooperation to say nothing of our government's."

The agents exchanged glances, then turned their eyes back to Waverly's, who gazed at them sadly. "You're to report to me on any development, large or small, and as soon as we're on the trail of Dacian and his abductors I'll have you join forces to make the kill. Any questions?"

Waverly's question was answered with silence.

"Very well, then," he said, turning the files over to them, "be on your way. You haven't a moment to lose. Study this information immediately, then speak to Transportation about the arrangements that have been made for your departure."

Napoleon Solo and Illya Kuryakin whirled on their heels and retreated from Waverly's office.

"Volcanoes," Illya muttered laconically.

"One of our hotter assignments," Napoleon said.

ACT II

ISLES OF HELL

SOUTHEAST of Celebes in the Indonesian Islands is the Banda Sea, a rich blue expanse of water that might be described as a lake within an ocean. It lies, almost like a stupendous crater, in the center of a crescent of volcanic islands to its south and a semi-circle of massive string of isles and atolls to the north.

Because of its partially protected position the sea escapes the rough handling of open ocean storms, but typhoons sweeping it in the season radiate their havoc from its axis and dash immense destructive waves on the shores of the many islands around its perimeter.

Inside the Banda a cluster of islands rear their craggy summits towards shrouds of cottony mist. Some of these islands, collectively known as the Lucipara group, are inhabited.

The gentle but hardy Sino-Polynesian folk, whose presence in this territory dates back to man's first attempts to explore the world beyond his shores, gather fish and fruit without effort and sustain their existence peacefully as they've done since pre-history.

Other islands here are desolate, however, for all attempts at animal and vegetable life to cling and flourish on their hostile stone precipices have been defeated. Moss, mollusks and sea-birds populate them and practically nothing more. It therefore must have puzzled these primitive denizens to see erected, on one of these forbidding isles, a scaffolding of steel very much resembling an oil rig. The island was nameless, though navigational charts numbered it if for no other reason than to prevent ships from cracking their hulls against its rocky facade.

But from the activity going on in the vicinity of the rig, the island might have been thought of as a super-civilized one. A handful of helicopters stood parked on the gentle but barren slope to the west of the rig, while on its east stood two strange igloo-like structures. These had been constructed out of aluminum frames covered with light canvas sprayed heavily with foam.

The foam, upon hardening almost instantly, provided airtight protection against the elements, yet was porous enough to permit ordinary bandsaws to

slice doors and windows out of it.

These had been covered with transparent plastic.

Closer examination of these huts disclosed banks of highly sophisticated electronic gear, powered by generators and batteries. On slowly-moving charts the needles of half a dozen sensors and recording devices traced straight or jagged lines whose significance was opaque to the rather belligerent Orientals who guarded the machinery jealously, Sten-guns at the ready.

It was a partially cloudy after noon, but the clouds swept through rather than over the island, creating a miserable mist that caused the knot of men standing around the rig to pull their tropical shirts away from their chests, as if the saturated cloth threatened to shrink on them and crush their rib cages.

The individuals watching the operation of the drilling gear were for the most part Orientals, grim-faced and furtive. From time to time one or another would look over his shoulder, as if he were doing something wrong and expected pursuers somehow to materialize unannounced.

Others shifted uneasily from foot to foot, appearing nervous about the safety of the machinery before them. They glanced frequently at the helicopters, reassuring themselves that their choppers were ready to bear them off instantaneously and without a hitch when the right moment came.

In this crowd of sallow, stolid men the short, redheaded white man stood out almost ludicrously. He was just five-and-a-half feet tall, matching the height of most of his Oriental colleagues. But unlike them, his head bore close-cropped orange-red hair and his skin had the milky white complexion that frequently accompanies hair of that color. He was about fifty, thin almost to emaciation, and wore olive drab Bermuda shorts and shirt.

His face, like theirs, was unsmiling, but instead of expressing objective scientific curiosity he seemed almost to dread the experiment unfolding before him. The fact that one of the members of the crowd trained a Sten on

the base of his spine might explain his decided lack of enthusiasm over the project.

TWO

THE ONLY PERSON with any semblance of amusement in his countenance was a stocky Oriental, quite tall for his race, who observed both rig and captive with a kind of smugness. His almond eyes dilated with satisfaction as he contemplated the event unfolding before him, and he seemed to carry no doubt whatsoever that success was within his grasp.

He was a barrel-chested man, with powerful arms and a squat neck that seemed to be all tendon. He wore white slacks and a bizarre Hawaiian shirt of red and green design, almost the only evidence of color on the entire island.

The rig they watched had the pyramidal shape of a typical drilling device, but was considerably shorter. There were no pipes, however, and no drill heads. Nor were there tubes or other apparatus to collect or store whatever it was these men were drilling for. And instead of conventional machinery, gas driven motors and water pumps and the like, a small cubical device stood over the shaft.

The device was about four feet square and encased in grey metal. From one side emerged a bundle of wires and electric cables that fed into a generator unit housed in one of the foam huts. And in the belly of this box was what seemed to be a zoom lens not unlike that of a camera.

Amid the sounds of waves pounding the rocks, and sea birds calling stridently to one another, came the throaty murmur of the generator and a sinister humming of the device itself. From time to time the mist surrounding the rig would be pierced by a bright shaft of purple light radiating from the lens, after which the air would be filled with an intense odor of ozone that hung in the heavy mist and rankled the observers' nostrils.

As this strange operation progressed, the stocky Oriental in the Hawaiian shirt moved through the little crowd and stood by the side of the redheaded white man. Silently they watched the process, but at last the Oriental addressed his companion.

"Forty-eight hours have come, Dr. Dacian, and forty-eight have passed."

"I said forty-eight, give or take a few hours. The exact length of time depends on the structure of the mantle, and the composition of the stone at the critical level. We have no way of knowing these facts except by inference. That is, if the beam penetrates and destroys the stone at a certain rate we know it's working on a certain material, and so on.

"We can also deduce the density of the mantle roughly, by relying on two factors. One is the changing relationship of echoes rebounding from the solid rock of the mantle and the molten mass of magma underneath it. The other, of course, is the increasing temperature as the drilling operation destroys the rock that stands between the magma and—us."

"I understand all this," said the Oriental, "except for one thing. If you cannot determine accurately the critical moment, how do we know that you might not err on the side of lateness rather than on that of earliness?"

Dr. Dacian smiled, for the first time that day. "My dear Kae Soong, since my invention was intended only for approaching the lava beneath man's feet, rather than striking into it, I have to confess again that I am not sure. As I've shown you, the machinery in that hut"—he nodded towards a small foam igloo to the left of the generator house—"is monitoring all developments, and is programmed to signal us as the drill approaches a heat level of volcanic intensity.

"From my experience and knowledge in geology, which I assure you is considerable, I think I can determine with ample room for error the crucial level. But because there are flaws in the earth's mantle which are impossible to detect with the relatively crude instruments at our disposal, it's possible that we could break through far earlier than we'd expected."

The Oriental frowned, "In which case—"

Dacian's smile broadened proportionately as Kae Soong's frown darkened. "In which case my device, to use a colorful American expression, would blow us all to hell."

Kae Soong pursed his lips and threw a sidelong glance at his helicopters.

"I am counting on your fear of death to prevent it," he said.

"I'm not a hero, true," the red head said lugubriously. "But I'm not clairvoyant either. Because I want to live, because I hope to escape, because I hope to see you dead, and because I'm frankly curious to see what my device is going to do, I've done my best to insure that the experiment goes successfully.

"But because I'm only human, and therefore fallible, I can offer you no guarantees. And if I'm wrong, destruction will come so quickly that I'll have no time to face it, bravely or cowardly. But this talk has made me nervous. Let's take a look at the monitors."

Kae Soong looked all too relieved to accompany the scientists to the hut where the sensors and recording apparatus stood. Behind them stood Dacian's guard, the muzzle of his gun leveled perpetually at the man's back, while on either side other surly soldiers held their guns in readiness as well.

Before them a broad tape slowly passed beneath six inked needles. As Dacian was about to point to the first needle his captor held back his arm and said, "Let me see if I have learned my lessons. This needle indicates temperature at the base of the shaft. This red line is the critical temperature. We seem to be almost there, yes?"

"Yes."

"And this needle records depth. The black marks you have made here indicate your guess as to the depth at which a breakthrough can be expected, is that correct?"

"Let's just say it's the level beyond which we'd be foolish to stick around."

"Quite," said Kae Soong. "And these needles record various aspects of the laser's operation. They do not seem to be fluctuating very much. I gather that means the pulse is steady and satisfactory."

Dacian nodded. "You're a good student, Kae Soong. I hope to have the pleasure of abducting you one day, to return the compliment you've paid me."

"I'm afraid I'm nowhere near as valuable to you as you are to me. But tell me, why is this needle not moving at all? It's recording a perfectly straight line."

"Let's hope it continues to do so," Dacian said. "Because when it begins to squiggle it will indicate approximately ten seconds of life left for us on earth. It's really a superfluous needle, but as I had nothing important to record with it I thought it would be amusing to convert it into a seismograph of sorts. After all, I don't see why you should have all the fun."

"I do," said Kae Soong, placing his chunky thumb and index finger on the delicate pen and bending it up, so that it looked like the needle of a scorpion poised to strike. "What would you estimate zero hour to be now?" he asked.

Dacian studied the chart carefully for a minute or two. "I suggest you order the team to board the helicopters in one hour. The flight should then proceed"—he glanced at an instrument and took a reading on wind direction—"due west so that the debris is blown away from it. The choppers should hover at a fairly high level about three miles from here. I would guess that the exact moment will come at four forty-one, give or take—" he chuckled, wringing out of misfortune as much amusement as possible "—three or four hours."

Kae Soong squirmed perceptibly. "Do not joke, Dacian. How much leeway is there?"

"Two minutes on either side," he said as the guards, taking their cue from the agitation in Soong's voice, shifted their feet and brought their guns to readiness.

They emerged from the hut and headed back to the site of the laser drill. In the period in which they had been away an eerie phenomenon had begun to occur over the device. The immense heat from the shaft, as the beam struck deeper and deeper towards the lava beneath the earth's mantle, rose with almost violent speed and sent the mist swirling into the sky so turbulently it looked as if they were standing on the rim of a cauldron.

"Won't the heat destroy the machine?" Soong asked nervously.

"No," the scientist assured him. "The metals will resist heat well into the crucial temperature, and so will the lens of the laser. I'm not sure I can say as much for the flesh of your friends, however. They look a bit under the weather."

The observers turned to the returning men, hoping for some instruction that would galvanize them into preparation to leave this accursed island and its monstrous experiment.

Kae Soong pronounced a series of commands and the group broke into a babble. Then they trotted away from the ominous device at the center of the saucer-shaped clearing, gathering their belongings and making last-moment preparations to record the effects of the ensuing climax.

One by one the blades of the helicopters began to spin, swirling through the steam mist and adding an even more diabolic cast to the atmosphere than before. The island seemed to be shrouded in steam, and nothing but the occasional flashes of purple light from the laser penetrated the grey haze.

The heat was rising rapidly, and the few birds that ventured over the shaft were borne upward in a violent thermal and deposited, roasted the sea.

Suddenly a warning bell went off, indicating that the apparatus was entering the final phase. The members of the team, some half blind with fear and others half blinded by the mist and steam, started to bolt towards the helicopters but bumped into each other or tripped over material on the ground.

"You said an hour remained," Kae Soong said angrily to Dacian as they hustled towards their helicopter.

"Oh, we still have forty-five minutes, but I guess I miscalculated the ability of the human system to cope with so much heat and so much fear."

"If I had the formula for that device I wouldn't have the slightest compunction about leaving you here," Soong said.

"I'm sure you'll wring it out of me in due time," the redhead answered.

They rushed to their helicopter, followed by Dacian's guard, and the machine raised them off the ground instantaneously. They kept the starboard door open so that they could watch the final moment of the experiment. Clouds of steam roiled like giant waves into the cabin, instantly soaking everything within and almost choking the inhabitants.

As soon as the helicopter was clear of the crag on the north side of the island it tilted due west and raced away from the site as if the clouds of hot mist were tentacles intent on gathering all of them back in and feeding them to the dreadful belching maw of this is land-monster.

After a moment six helicopters emerged from the billows and proceeded on a westerly course, gaining altitude as they gained distance. After a few minutes they halted and began hovering at the point where Dacian had suggested. What seemed an inordinate length of time passed, and because of the mist that shrouded the entire island group it was impossible to see the specific isle on which the device stood.

But the turbulence over that spot marked it clearly, and though they were now well out of the danger zone, the temperature in the helicopter rose as the clock approached 4.41.

All eyes were fixed on the site, and at around 4.35 the white clouds began to turn brown, then black while an ominous red glow illuminated the spot where their binoculars were focused.

Suddenly the glow deepened to bright orange, and in another moment a titanic fireball swelled up from the island, throwing great pieces of white-hot rock and pumice into the sky. For several seconds the air around the site cleared completely as the heat vaporized the mist.

In those seconds was disclosed the awesome spectacle of a volcano being born. The crags of the island were no more, and in their place seethed a fiery mass of molten lava, from the center of which radiated great waves of white-capped water. Then the lava spilled out over the rim of its crater and sent gigantic plumes and geysers of steam thousands of feet into the air.

The rumble of material pouring from the world's bowels, the searing hiss of ocean converted into steam, the orange river of magma flowing into the sea, and the stench of sulfur resembled nothing less than a nightmare out of Dante.

Edward Dacian, who had thought he knew what to expect, sat stupefied, his mouth open. The rest of the team stared in almost humble silence. Only Kae Soong appeared fully calm. He gazed, eyes wide with pleasure and lips drawn in a smile of satisfaction, at the product of the most potent weapon ever created.

"It occurred at four thirty-eight, not four forty-one," he finally remarked to his captive as the helicopters turned away from the first man-made volcano ever created.

"Nobody's perfect," Dacian explained.

ACT III

FOR SALE—DEATH

ALTHOUGH THREE people were waiting ahead of him, the bony man was admitted as soon as he announced himself to the secretary.

"This way, Mr. Rawlings. Mr. Greyling has been expecting you." The petite girl, her red jumper shifting provocatively as she led him down a corridor,

had been most eager to accommodate him. She thrust open the door to Mr. Greyling's office and bade him pass before her.

She led the bony guest into an inner office and introduced him to its occupant, a squat, florid man with crew-cut grey hair and a too-ingratiating, almost fatuous grin. They shook hands and both Greyling and his secretary tripped over each other to help their guest into his seat.

"You'll let me offer you some thing, won't you? Buy you breakfast, perhaps?" Greyling said to his guest.

"I don't think so," Rawlings said. "Suppose we get right down to business."

"Fine, fine. Couldn't ask for anything more. That's the way I like to do things. Roll up your sleeves and plunge right in."

Greyling spread his lips in an almost leering grin. Then his eyes focused on the thin grey scar on the left side of Rawlings' brow. It was an interesting wound, but Greyling decided it was best to say nothing about it. Greyling had a weird-shaped war wound on his belly and didn't mind talking about it, but some folks are funny about these things. The deal was too important to risk offending this character.

"Well," said Greyling, "as I understand it, you're interested in the Sperber property. If you don't mind my saying so, you're a very shrewd man indeed, Mr. Rawlings. Fifteen years ago, that bunch of oil wells promised to be the biggest producer in Oklahoma, maybe even in the southwest. But the men who tapped the well were after the fast buck. Know what I mean?

"They just wanted to skim the surface oil, raise it by means of the gas pocket down that hole, and when the gas fizzled out they didn't care a hoot for building a rig to pump the rest of the stuff out. So as far as anyone knows, there's a mighty big pool of black gold sitting under the Sperber property waiting for the right man to invest a little dough and bring it up."

He looked into Rawlings faded blue eyes for a sign of greed—the dilated pupil, the glazed stare he had seen so often as he began to weave one of his preposterous stories to hook the real estate sucker.

But no such change came over Rawlings' countenance. It remained calm and almost dispassionate. The bony man had simply nodded politely as Greyling did his spiel, and then looked at him blankly when the speech was over.

Greyling began to wonder. The guy didn't really seem to care what story he told him; he was, as he'd announced on the phone, desirous of buying the Sperber property and didn't need to be sold on it. Well then, Greyling said to himself, don't try to sell the guy on it, otherwise you may sell yourself right out of a sale.

"Uh, tell me, Mr. Rawlings," the broker said, hoping to find out what kind of backing the man had, "what's the name of your firm?"

"Land Development Enterprises," Rawlings said flatly.

"I see. Can't say as how I'm familiar with that one," be said. Obviously a dummy corporation, Greyling concluded, and after putting a few more leading questions to his guest abandoned the inquiries.

It was clear that whoever wanted this land didn't want his identity revealed, which meant Greyling would be unable to estimate what the buyer had in mind as far as price was concerned. So he would have to resort to the time-honored system of offer and acceptance, which in turn meant getting the buyer to name his price. "Just what terms did your firm have in mind?" he asked.

"You said on the phone," countered the visitor, "that you could name a fair price."

Greyling frowned. He hated to start the bargaining, but obviously the men behind Rawlings were good bargainers, and with a cow-pasture like the Sperber property anything over five digits was a killing. So he launched a ten-minute tirade on the beauties of the land, the untapped wealth below its surface, the relative prices of land in the area, the booming economy, his personal troubles and, in case Rawlings wanted the land for something other than its oil wells, its potential value both as farm and factory property.

Towards the end of his speech his visitor began looking around the room and shifting in his seat. Greyling had a good sense of audience and realized he was putting off his guest, so he hastened to his conclusion and said, "So I don't think I'm being at all unreasonable in suggesting thirty-five thousand for the land. I have so much faith in those wells that I'm tempted to request a royalty on the oil you raise, but if you pay the full amount now, in cash, I'll drop that request."

Greyling settled back in his chair and strained the muscles of his face against the temptation to look eager. His eyes scrutinized the face of his customer for that pained reaction that inevitably appeared when a ridiculous price was named.

However no expression except thoughtfulness crossed Rawlings' demeanor, and, after only a few moments, he said, "That will be acceptable."

Greyling suppressed a gasp. Barely, controlling the tremble in his voice, he buzzed his secretary and said "Please come in with a deed blank, and your pad and pencil. And be prompt. Mr. Rawlings is in a hurry."

TWO

IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, in Pennsylvania, in Florida and in about six other key locations in the United States, similar negotiations were being carried on. In each case the buyer represented a dummy company interested in buying an abandoned oil property. And in each case the broker or principal named a price far too high, expecting a counter-proposition. And in each case the terms were accepted calmly, to the astonishment of the seller.

And after the papers were drawn up, the seller inevitably wondered, as his pen poised to sign his property over to the purchaser, if he had perhaps not sold it too cheaply.

But the phenomenon was not restricted to the United States. Similar deals were being consummated in such widely divergent places as Venezuela,

Arabia, Iran, France, Turkey, and even in Communist countries, where land was not held privately, arrangements were made for an unknown syndicate to occupy an abandoned oil site. Within a period of weeks a network of such sites or, if the nation had no oil facilities, old mineshafts, had been established around the globe.

After each site was secure the agent would send a coded cable to Singapore, where a stocky but rather tall Oriental read it with satisfaction and pushed another pin into his atlas.

THREE

THE LABORATORIES of Gulf Coast Power and Light were set off from the immense complex of grids and high voltage equipment that sprawled over twenty acres of southwestern Texas land. The large white adobe building seemed to shrink under the intimidating whine of the machinery on the other side of the decorative pond that set it off.

Illya Kuryakin crossed the little foot bridge over that pond. Lilies floated on its surface and goldfish darted from under a rock. He paused to admire this little tribute to peacefulness amid the shrieks and hums of high-powered hardware.

Beyond the pond, about thirty yards from the laboratory, a laminated steel fence had been erected with signs suggesting that a curious person would be treated with considerable displeasure.

But the fence did not conceal entirely the scaffolding inside it, which rose almost as high as that of an oil well.

Illya continued across the bridge and passed through the doors of the laboratory, where he was greeted by a red-headed receptionist whose eyes reflected their appreciation for Illya's blond, steel-eyed good looks.

She announced him to the lady who was expecting him, and with disappointment showed him to an inner office and turned him over to Frieda

Winter.

Her official title, according to the lettering on her door, was assistant director of experimental projects, and Illya, thinking in stereotypes, had expected a stout woman with mousy hair, horn-rimmed glasses and a white smock that would display about as much figure as a pup tent.

If he was disappointed, it certainly didn't show in the warm glow that spread over his cheeks as his eyes took her in. She was, for a laboratory worker and administrator, quite a dish. Her hair was dark auburn, almost black with red highlights, and her eyes hazel and round and intense. She wore no smock at all, but a red skirt with matching sweater that revealed a splendid figure.

During the course of conversation Illya Kuryakin managed to sneak a look at her ankles, hoping to find some disfigurement that would release him from having to be interested in Frieda Winter the woman, and enable him to pay the strictest attention to Frieda Winter the scientist. But her ankles were as well-turned as any item of fine furniture.

Evidently she was thinking much the same thing about him, for she said, "I somehow expected a Dick Tracy hat and the rest of the G-Man bit."

Illya smiled boyishly. "No, the investigative offices have become very cool these days. I mean, we try to be cool. It makes our enemies think we're not scared to death. It also," he added, "makes women think we're not terribly interested in them."

"I suppose that's a good thing, professionally speaking."

"Professionally speaking," Illya said. They exchanged glances, then Illya dropped his eyes, sighed, and said, "Suppose we speak professionally then."

"Yes." She walked to her desk and sat down. "How much do you know about Dr. Dacian and his work?"

"Quite a lot, but suppose you tell me everything, from the way he was hired to the events of the last day you saw him. Then I'd like you to show me the

apparatus and explain its operation to me as completely as you can. I have more technical knowledge than you think, but quite a lot less than I'd like to have, so speak to me like a colleague but don't be surprised when I ask some incredibly stupid questions."

She smiled. Then, after ordering coffee from the laboratory cafeteria, she began to tell Illya all about the engagement of Edward Dacian by Gulf Coast Power and Light.

It had been well known that Gulf Coast was experimenting with the idea of tapping the heat beneath the mantle of the earth to produce cheap electricity, and Dacian had read about the lab's work in a journal. Their experiments corresponded to some he had been performing at Colorado School of Mining, but the school simply couldn't put at his disposal the kind of financial backing he needed to explore his ideas to their logical conclusion. Thus he got in touch with Gulf Coast and was hired.

Within eight months he had constructed a laser of enormous power, operating on light transmitted through gas instead of crystal and using a system of "mirrors" which were made of opaque liquids contained in saucer-shaped crystal containers.

The liquids intensified the laser beam terrifically, but their formula was known only to Dr. Dacian, and they constituted the essence of his earth-piercing apparatus.

"Dr. Dacian," Frieda Winter explained, "learned that the beam works most effectively in already-existing shafts. The beam, in other words, is poor at starting a hole, but if it operates in a well the walls of the shaft contain the potency of the beam. The beam works faster the deeper the shaft. We ascertained that it took the beam twenty-four hours to dig through the first two thousand feet of surface, twelve hours to pierce the next two thousand, and so on almost in geometric proportions."

"In other words, it would take about forty-eight hours to penetrate the mantle in a land formation of average depth, but only about two if the beam were sent down a shaft the depth, say, of an average oil well."

The girl looked at him with admiration.

"It didn't take very long for you to calculate that," she said.

"In most things I think fast. Now tell me, was Dr. Dacian's progress publicized?"

"Only by word of mouth. We tried to prevent official publicity and tried to stop gossip, but unfortunately people aren't made that way, and I imagine somebody got loose-tongued over a drink. I assure you it wasn't I," she said quickly.

"You needn't be defensive," the U.N.C.L.E. agent assured her. "Now I'd like you to tell me, or check for me, whether during this time any suspicious individuals came to work for your company. It stands to reason that the persons most suspect are those who quit their jobs around the same time as Dacian disappeared."

Frieda Winter handed Illya Kuryakin a slim file. "You'll find in there the records of six people who joined the company, in capacities ranging from janitor to executive, and left in a period ranging from two weeks before to two weeks after Dr. Dacian's disappearance. Everyone else has been checked thoroughly or is under surveillance, but these six have not been located."

Illya removed six smaller envelopes from the file and opened each, removing neatly arranged dossiers on the individuals in question. They contained, among other things, a photograph of the person, used on identification badges or cards which all personnel were required to carry with them at all times.

Illya, one of whose duties was to brief himself regularly on the faces of his antagonists, glanced quickly at each picture, studying it and comparing it with a mental image in his brain's rogue's gallery.

On the fifth photo his eyes widened. The bony face, the angular Adam's apple, the unusual grey scar on the brow, tallied with a face Illya knew.

He studied the accompanying documents: Paul Rollins, alias Rawlings and a few other pseudonyms, had come to work for Gulf Coast as a groundskeeper. His employers had not bothered to check on background or references for such an inconsequential job, but after Dacian's disappearance an investigation had disclosed that Rollins had been involved in a number of criminal activities and had a prison record. He had also been arraigned on a kidnapping charge but his case had been dismissed for lack of evidence.

"This looks like our man," Illya said.

"Most likely it is," Frieda said. "The F.B.I. agrees and is already putting a search out for him. And incidentally—"

Illya anticipated her question. "I work for a different outfit," he explained, "and all I can tell you is that we're good guys, just like the F.B.I. But we aren't too chummy with those fellows, and besides, our records are often more complete than theirs."

"I see."

"I would like to transit this material to my superior officers so that they can run routine checks on the other five, but I would especially like to find out as much as possible about this Rollins. Perhaps during lunch—."

"As much as we know about him is in that envelope," Frieda said lugubriously. "But perhaps we can find another excuse for lunch."

"Would mutual hunger be acceptable?"

"You are a fast thinker!"

They went to the laboratory's cafeteria and took their seats at a table away from other diners. After the main course the U.N.C.L.E. agent excused himself and contacted Waverly, telling him as much as he'd learned and suggesting that all data on Paul Rollins be sifted and the man's current whereabouts be traced if possible. Then Illya returned to the cafeteria for dessert and coffee.

"I want to hear more about Dr. Dacian's experiments," he said. "Did he ever suggest when talking to you, for instance, that his beam might have a potential other than peaceful?"

"Yes, he did. Well, let me put it this way. He said to me once that he shuddered to think of what might happen if the instrument were used by someone who didn't know exactly what he was doing. Then he thought for a moment and said he shuddered even more to think that it might fall into the hands of a wicked person who did know exactly what he was doing."

"How well did you know Dr. Dacian?"

"We were good friends," Frieda said, her face registered no indication that anything more serious might have existed between them. "He was an enormously outgoing and expansive man. He wore his heart on his sleeve and I don't think there was a furtive or dishonest bone in his body. He was patriotic, and he had a strong revulsion to what he called wickedness. In short, Mr. Kuryakin, he was a peaceful man, and it would take overwhelming evidence to make me believe he defected or sold out."

"Calm down," Illya said. "I never suggested anything of the sort. I only want to know if he realized that the peaceful instrument he had created might also be converted into a weapon. And I suppose I want to know to what extent he could resist pressure to disclose his formulas to anyone he suspected of having 'wicked' intentions."

"I believe Edward Dacian would die before revealing them. He was that kind of man."

"Yes, but could he be forced to produce the rigs themselves?"

"I just don't know. I'm told that wicked people use some rather nasty techniques for coercing their fellow men."

Illya smiled. "That is about the mildest statement I have ever heard. You're very charming, Miss Winter."

The girl blushed, and an embarrassed pause ensued. Then she said "I imagine you're interested in a demonstration. Why don't we go behind the laboratory and look at Dr. Dacian's apparatus."

"Fine."

They pushed away from the table and proceeded out the building into a garden in the rear. The sun was strong and warm, and the air was fragrant with perfume from semi-tropical flowers.

Frieda Winter unlocked the door of the compound and they entered. She reached under an almost invisible bubble in the fence and switched off an electric eye guarding the perimeter of the rig. They then strolled up to the scaffolding, and Illya scrambled under the pipes and tubes to get a closer look at the machinery at the center. It was disappointingly simple, the vital mechanisms being sheathed in steel so that only a tubular lens extended from the box's belly. A shaft about a yard in diameter yawned beneath the tube.

A thick pipeline emerged from the ground near the rig, and nearby on a kind of dolly stood a complicated knot of ducts, valves, gauges and the like.

"Water is pumped into the shaft from that pipeline," Frieda explained. "Of course, if the shaft extended from a river bed or ocean floor, we would not need to pump in water at all. But since it would have been too expensive to do that for experimental purposes, we simply tapped the Gulf waters. Come here."

She beckoned to Kuryakin to stand near the mouth of the shaft. He approached it but by the time he was standing by her side the heat from the bowels of the earth was almost intolerable. They backed off.

"Once the shaft is dug by the beam, the water is passed into it under controlled means, and this apparatus here," she said pointing to the dolly, "is sealed over the shaft. It receives the steam and keeps it superheated until it can be converted into mechanical energy. Of course, if this were an electric plant, a number of shafts would be sent down, and they would be considerably wider than this one, you understand.

"And they would be harnessed directly to dynamos instead of linked up from a distance, as we've done here. Nevertheless, as crude as our apparatus is, we've produced electricity more abundantly and cheaply than any other source known to man. And all we do," she smiled, "is add water."

"But if you sent your beam too far—"

"We would have the first active volcano in the continental United States, to state the matter unimaginatively."

They gazed at the apparatus respectfully, then returned to the laboratory.

ACT IV

KEY TO HELL

THE TRUCK PULLED up to the prefabricated hut on the Sperber site, and the driver and two helpers got out of the cab. The driver knocked on the door of the hut and was greeted by a gaunt man with a funereal expression on his face and a strange grey scar running almost from temple to temple.

The driver thrust a set of papers under the bony man's nose, murmuring, "Scaffolding."

While Paul Rollins, alias Rawlings, was examining the bill of lading, the driver and his helpers ambled away and gazed with perplexity at the bleak property. Some scrubby trees grew here and there, and wild grass and sage covered the rocky soil to the edge of the property, which was bounded by a range of hills on the west and a river on the east and south.

Spaced out at intervals of an acre or so were the skeletons of oil rigs, rusty and useless.

The driver pushed his Stetson up on his brow and scratched his balding head.

'What do you think?" be whispered.

"I think they either know there's oil down there, or else they're all crazy as bedbugs," said one helper.

"If there's oil down there," said the other helper, "I'll drink a glass of it before breakfast every day for the rest of my life."

"Maybe they're not drilling for oil?" said the first.

"Of course not," said the driver, "they're drilling for high octane gasoline."

The three men laughed, and then one of the helpers said "Truthfully, now, what kind of rig can they construct with the scaffolding we brung 'em? There ain't enough there to construct any kind of oil rig I've ever seen, and I've seen 'em all."

"Maybe they're expecting another load of scaffolding, or getting it from some other outfit than us," the driver surmised.

"Maybe," his assistants agreed. "But if that's all they're using," the driver went on, "I don't reckon they'll get much deeper than fifty yards."

They chuckled again and ambled back to the hut, where the bony man gave them their signed copies of the papers. They unloaded the pipes, plates, and hardware and departed, smirking.

Rollins assembled his crew and they set about wrecking the pumping rig over the well furthest from the road. After it had been removed, the crew carried the scaffolding to the well and began erecting a low rig resembling a quarter-scale model of an oil-drilling tower. A square space was left in the middle over the oil shaft, a space exactly the dimensions of Edward Dacian's volcano box. When the job was done, Rollins had a. coded message cabled to Singapore.

And from several dozen other places throughout the world, similar cables issued.

TWO

EDWARD DACIAN raised his heavy eyelids and looked at the ceiling of his cell. It was white and sterile, and he silently gave thanks that although he was a prisoner he was not being held in a dank, cold dungeon. The place was white-plastered, air-conditioned, and, though austere, not uncomfortable.

The only trouble was that his captors were not feeding him. His bowels had been playing games with his system the last few days, alternating between severe diarrhea and severe constriction. And now there was nothing at all in his stomach and it didn't matter; he felt nothing.

They had not begun to torture him yet, but he knew it must follow soon. Because he was a coward he had allowed himself to be frightened into a limited agreement. He would construct his devices, one at a time, with the materials they provided for him. But he would not disclose the formula by which the devices were put together, nor the secret of the liquid mirrors by which the laser beam was intensified to literally earth-shattering proportions.

He had bluffed them into believing that he would give up his life before revealing those formulas, but in his heart he doubted whether he could withstand physical agony. And so, dawdling as best he could, he made his machines and was almost finished with the third. The first had created the volcano in one of the numerous Luciparan islands.

The second had all but wiped Tapwana, the rebellious island, off the map. And this one? It would undoubtedly be employed against a target considerably more ambitious than a petty island.

He knew he had little time left before they lost their patience with him. Yesterday they had taken him to a factory where he had seen three dozen of his machines being constructed. They had of course analyzed his other two and used them as bases for this large crop. Nevertheless his special formulas had eluded their analyses so far, and when they were through with the devices they would really begin pressing him to give away the essential secret so that the mirrors could be installed.

From what he could see of their progress on the basic device, he had only a few days left.

Then it would be torture.

He thought about the ancient tortures, racks and things like that, but he knew they had far more sophisticated ones than those nowadays. He had seen pictures of men whose brains had been so scrambled they were mere puppets. He could be one of them. The mere thought sent a ripple down his spine.

They were softening him up. Already the want of food and sleep was beginning to tell on him. He had begun to wonder what difference it made who had the formula or what was done with it. If the human race was hell-bent on destroying itself, it would be done whether they used his device or atomic bombs or fists and teeth.

But no, that train of thought was contrary to everything he had come to hold dear. There were still decent people in the world, and he could never obliterate the distinction in his mind between those decent ones and the wicked ones. Before he did his mind itself would be obliterated.

Dr. Edward Dacian gazed at the white ceiling, wondering just how much pain he could stand before they made him tell.

THREE

ALEXANDER WAVERLY studied the transcript of Illya Kuryakin's report, frowning. He removed his pipe from his mouth and, with the mouthpiece, tapped the description of Paul Rollins as if to sound a chest for a false bottom. His mind, like the memory bank of a great computer, was permitting a controlled cascade of associations and memories to fill his consciousness until he had recollected almost everything there was to know about Rollins.

Nevertheless it was wise to double-check, and of course to investigate the other suspects whose descriptions Illya had just given him. And besides, Waverly wanted to know the up-to-date whereabouts of the gaunt, scar-browed man.

He called Henderson in the Research Division of U.N.C.L.E. and immediately a review of the files was instigated on a Top Priority basis.

Rollins' file was dealt with first, and Waverly and his advisor sat before the screen of the information retriever, which scanned the organization's vast library of tapes for the one on which Rollins' data was located.

This data was printed out, while at the same time a photo of him was retrieved from the microfilm library and flashed on the Recordak screen, within moments after the instructions on Rollins had been programmed into the computer.

Waverly and Henderson studied the reports and renewed their acquaintance with the unpleasant features of Rollins. "Looks like an undertaker, doesn't he?" said Henderson.

Waverly nodded lugubriously. "That may be a more appropriate description than you think."

"Sir?"

"I believe he intends to bury us, you see. In molten lava." Waverly turned from the picture to the print-out of Rollins' dossier. "I know all this," he muttered impatiently, "but where is the data on his latest whereabouts?"

"Next page, sir."

Waverly flipped over the accordioned pages of the print-out and found, with considerable gratification, that as 1ittle as two weeks ago the U.N.C.L.E. agent in the Oklahoma sector had recognized Rollins and, with the help of state police, was having a routine surveillance placed on him.

"Please contact Reid in Oklahoma at once," Waverly said to Henderson, "and have him report fully on Rollins' precise location and activities."

Henderson, who recognized the imperative tone of Waverly's voice easily after years of working with him, rushed away from the retrieval computers as if fired out of a gun.

Waverly returned to his office and followed up on some other hunches he was coming to call "Dacian's volcano boxes." But he kept his eye cocked on his watch and wondered what was holding things up on that report from Oklahoma. Though an hour had gone by and no more, he still expected his organization to bring about a miraculous, instantaneous report.

As often as not, because he demanded miracles, he got them. But it took another two hours be fore Reid was on the communicator, spilling what he had learned about Rollins.

"He seems to be involved in an oil scheme of some sort, sir," Reid's husky voice told Waverly. "His procedures appear to be on the up-and-up; he purchased some land near here legitimately, and ditto for some tower scaffolding. The crew erecting the scaffolding don't smell too clean, however. A number of them have records or are otherwise suspicious."

"Very interesting," Waverly said, stuffing a wad of tobacco into a tan briar pipe and pushing papers around his desk in a hunt for his tobacco-tamping tool. "Have you or the police observed the presence of a box-like instrument with a large lens on it, like the zoom lens of a camera?"

"No, sir, but I do have one very interesting piece of information."

"Yes?"

"About ten days ago he cabled an innocuous message to Singapore. The cable address there was SINGOIL. Sounds like a contraction of Singapore Oil, which is probably the outfit behind Rollins' oil venture. That's all I know, sir."

"What was the message in that cable?"

"The message was 'All Well.'"

"Yes." Having found his tamping tool, Waverly's fingers were tapping his papers to find the outline of his matchbox. "Yes, I see. But all is not well, Reid. I want you personally to investigate Rollins' property and the drilling tower he is erecting. You are to look for a box of the kind I've described to you on his property, the dimensions and exact description of which will be telexed to you as soon as our conversation is concluded. You're to contact me the moment you find such a device or find out where it is being stored."

"Then it's not oil they're after?" said Reid.

"No, Reid. The exact nature of the device will be telexed to you. For now, let's just say that its presence is a grave threat to world security."

"Yes, sir. I'll get on this right away."

They signed off, and the second Reid's voice was cleared from his communicator Waverly was alerting the division heads of a dozen different agency sub-sections, barking instructions at them like a drill sergeant. Every local U.N.C.L.E. operative in the United States was to be contacted right away with the instructions to follow up on any THRUSH agent or criminal element involved in the erection of oil drilling equipment.

A description of the volcano box was to be sent to them, and they were to search for it and report upon detecting it. Similar instructions were issued throughout U.N.C.L.E.'s international network, for it was obvious that THRUSH'S objective was not necessarily America. The agent in Singapore was ordered to check into the individual or individuals using the cable ad dress SINGOIL.

Finally, Waverly decided to get in touch with Napoleon to report on these developments and find out just what his other chief agent had ascertained.

Waverly knew himself to be an impatient man, but with this much at stake, the errors that might arise out of impatience were far less serious than those that might derive from sloth.

FOUR

NAPOLEON SOLO had flown by conventional means to Hong Kong and thence to Singapore. In Singapore he conferred with Joe Kingsley, U.N.C.L.E.'s temporary director; then transportation was arranged to Borua.

Since that island, and all of the islands in its federation, were hostile to peaceful interests, Napoleon would have to be smuggled in.

After resting for six hours, he made his way to a small airport outside the city, where an American jet fighter carried him to a carrier in the Banda Sea. From there he was put on a launch which conveyed him to the waters off Borua. He was greeted by a longboat and rowed to a beach on the south side of the island at a speed he wouldn't have thought possible.

The night was overcast and his arrival on this deserted spot was uneventful. A guide led him to an outpost on the side of a hillock, and as the curtain was drawn aside to admit him into the camouflaged hut, he was given a warm, comradely welcome by his fellow agent, April Dancer. The beautiful young girl wore a khaki shirt and Bermuda-length fatigue shorts and dirty sneakers, but nothing could alter the fact that U.N.C.L.E.'s contact in the Boruvian federation was as lovely as a calendar pinup. Her large, expressive eyes shimmered in the flicker of gas lamps. They appraised Napoleon with a mixture of trust and affection.

"Mr. Solo, I presume."

"April, I'm glad to work with you." He quickly described his trip, then said, "Do you have some liquid refreshment for a weary traveler? I've changed modes of transportation so often today I feel like a pinball."

"I have some warm gin and tonic," April said. And she added "but perhaps a Coke would suit you better." This told Napoleon Solo they were free to speak.

He accepted the Coke and, after excusing the guide, they sat down to talk. As background to their conversation, a short-wave apparatus hummed on a

table behind April, and all around the hut there were hoots and cackles of tropical birds.

"Nice place you have here," he said smiling.

"The maid hasn't dusted this week, so you'll have to forgive the untidiness, the snakes and the scorpions."

Napoleon shifted in his seat. "I've briefed myself to a great extent on the situation here, but I'd still like you to go over it again with me. I assume that Mr. Waverly has informed you of the urgency of our situation."

"Oh yes." Her voice was throaty and mellow, and Napoleon knew how effective April was in applying her abundant female attributes on an antagonist to make him speak freely. On the other hand, as a trained agent she was perfectly adept in the arts of self-defense, and what her muscles could not effect, her pocket arsenal could.

"Tell me all you've learned, and I'll decide what's useful and what's not."

"Fine," April said. "Well, about five years ago a native named Emilio Sarabando caught the nationalistic fever and formed a federation of the islands in this area, called the Boruvian Federation after this its principal island. The Federation doesn't seem very important when you look at it casually, but actually it has strategic importance for two reasons: it's a source of certain rare-earth minerals, and it commands certain trade routes in the Indo-Chinese territory. Submarines or missiles based hereabouts could disrupt shipping in this neighborhood quite severely.

"Anyway," April Dancer continued, tugging on a Coke herself, "about a year ago Sarabando grew discontent with his political status and began making noises like a dictator. Our top brass decided that Sarabando, who is not the tyrant type, though he is a strong politician, was stepping out of character. We smelled control over him by another power. It didn't take me long to trace the strings to THRUSH. Sarabando is their puppet and has been for a year."

Napoleon Solo absorbed this information and sat thoughtfully for a moment. Then he asked, "What happened with Tapwana?"

"Tapwana is the outermost island in the crescent. It's a key one because it controls the channel between the Federation and the Luciparas. Some people think the inhabitants of Tapwana are not of the same racial stock as those of the rest of the Boruvian group, but in any event they have resisted incorporation into the group from the beginning, and when THRUSH began putting pressure on them to come in, they rebelled quite belligerently.

"So, about a week before the horrible volcano eruption, Sarabando warned the governor of Tapwana that grave consequences would ensue if the island didn't fall in line with the political structure of the Federation. The governor in effect spit in Sarabando's eye, and you know what happened then. Come."

April Dancer rose and took Napoleon by the hand. She led him out of the hut and up a rough path towards the top of the hill. When they reached the summit they plopped down on an outcropping of rock, and gazed west in the direction of Tapwana. For several minutes, in the blackness of the night and the roiling of black clouds overhead, Napoleon could distinguish nothing on the horizon where her finger pointed.

But after a while he realized that one spot seemed to glow, and as his eyes adjusted he could make out an eerie reddish-orange flickering. She pressed a pair of binoculars into his hands, and through them he could see a horrible yet fascinatingly beautiful turmoil of red molten metal churning far out to sea. His ears became aware of a rumbling, which he realized was not thunder but the sound of the earth throwing up its vitals in long, rhythmically timed spasms.

Focusing more precisely, he could make out the outline of a small cone out of which the lava spewed. With the passage of time that cone would grow to mountainous proportions, continuing to emit the seething magma until the formation of a crust, and cooling rains, capped it and made it dormant.

But that could take years, decades, even eons, and meanwhile life on that island, and on those islands nearby that directly received the pumice and

cinders and soot ejaculated from Tapwana, could not exist.

"They say that the stuff that comes out of volcanoes makes great soil after a few million years," he said humorlessly. "Meanwhile, though, humanity has to have some place to rest its feet without getting them burned off. I don't think I like the idea of volcanic eruptions on the main streets of my favorite cities." He put the binoculars to his eyes once again, gazed at Tapwana in awe, then gave them back to April.

They looked out to sea, watching the ebb and flow of the reddish light on the horizon, and letting the cool night breeze play on their cheeks.

"It's like taking your favorite gal to a drive-in movie," Napoleon murmured.

April leaned against his shoulder. "It's good to have you here, Napoleon. How's Illya?"

Solo brought Dancer up to date on his friend's coordinating mission. A gust of wind bent the trees inland and Napoleon put a protective arm around her shoulder. "It's getting a little too chilly," he said.

"Yes, let's go back to the hut."

Hand in hand they descended to the shack. "I don't suppose you were aware," April said as they sat down over a crude table, "that as you came down that hill you were never more than two feet away from the muzzle of a gun or the blade of machete."

"I imagined you'd have guards posted. Silent devils, aren't they?"

"Yes, but the enemy can be just as silent. I worry for you, so please let's transact our business quickly and get you out of here."

"That's fine with me. I want you to tell me what events led up to the volcano in the last days of Tapwana. I learned from your report that Edward Dacian was here."

"Yes, but our U.N.C,L.E. agent, Philip Bouvier, working here, wasn't sure, although he had of course been shown a photograph of Dr. Dacian while in

training in Singapore. Philip Bouvier is half French and half native. Maybe you remember his assignment in the Tahitian Affair? Yes, he's terribly clever. Philip communicated with Harry Gray and informed him that a fleet of helicopters had landed on the far side of the island, and Sarabando had gone out there to meet with the men who got off. The descriptions given left much to be desired, but two seemed rather distinctive. One was of a white man with close-cropped red hair, who certainly was Dacian, as reports from headquarters later verified.

"The other was a barrel-chested oriental who seemed quite tall for one of his race, and we can safely guess that it's Kae Soong. Soong is chief THRUSH operative in this area, and it's well known that he's directly responsible for the control exerted over the dictator."

"Yes, go on."

"Philip managed to get in closer, due to the unfortunate guard whose throat managed to get in the vicinity of his dagger. He trained binoculars on the party and got a glimpse of the red-haired Dacian, but Soong was inside in conference with Sarabando and things got too warm to hang around. Anyway, the next thing Philip knew was that they were taking off in the direction of Tapwana. He couldn't be sure that was their destination, but the events of the last few months pointed to it."

"Did we have anyone on Tapwana?"

"None of our regulars, no. We had a man there on the payroll, but we didn't know if he could be trusted, especially on something that, from what we could gather, was shaping up to be pretty big. So that night Philip set out by launch for Tapwana, which is about four hours away.

"He stashed the launch in a cove and made his way towards the city. He guessed that if the helicopter party was anywhere at all it would be at Sarabando's villa-type office.

"He was right. The lights burned brightly at two in the morning, and the place was swarming with armed guards and spectators. Obviously a pretty serious pow-wow was in progress.

"Philip then made his way to the back of the building and saw, in the broad courtyard and field behind the villa, five helicopters. But he knew that six had taken off for the island. So one of them had broken away from the others.

"He had no idea who or what it contained, or where it had gone. But around three, when the conference broke up, the five copters took off again in the direction of Borua. Not long afterwards, however, Philip Bouvier saw that six returned!"

"Strange. Or at least it must have seemed strange then. But you of course know now what happened."

"Certainly. While Kae Soong and his boys were trying to bring the Tapwanans peacefully to their knees, Dacian was elsewhere on the island, planting his little volcano box. Obviously negotiations failed, and Kae Soong signaled Dacian to throw the switch."

"What did Philip Bouvier do when the helicopters left?"

"He visited the governor, who knows about U.N.C.L.E. The governor had defied the group of 'thugs,' as he called them."

"Did he say Kae Soong was their leader?"

"Soong never presented himself by name; merely as The Gentleman from Singapore. They're very formal around here. But the governor was sure it was Soong. At any rate, the governor felt that the thugs wouldn't trouble him again, now that they had seen how determined his people were to retain their independence from the Boruvian Federation. Philip wasn't so sure about that. He headed back to Borua, and was told by his man there that after a few hours, the helicopters had taken off in a northerly direction."

"Towards where, do you guess?"

"Eventually to Singapore."

"What happened then?"

"Nothing eventful, but on the third morning following their visit to Tapwana the island was boiled off the face of the earth."

As if to emphasize the horror of such a scene, a deep rumble sounded far off in the west.

"I flew over it," April said, and suddenly her lip trembled and her eyes filled with tears. "Nothing. Not a tree, not a dwelling, not a hint of life, not a soul. Oh Napoleon, we've got to stop them—we've got to!"

April Dancer had taken his wrist in her hand and her nails almost cut through his flesh. All at once a low beeping sound emitted from the short wave set.

"That will be headquarters," Napoleon said. "And Philip Bouvier—where is he now, April?"

"Returning here he was shot at and wounded. I was able to get most of this first-hand information from him in the hospital in Singapore."

ACT V

THE MAN FROM SINGAPORE

EVERYTHING pointed to Singapore.

Paul Rollins, who had purchased the oil wells in Oklahoma had cabled to Singapore when the deal was made.

Kae Soong had called himself The Man from Singapore.

His helicopter squadron appeared to be based in Singapore.

It was clear that the THRUSH operation was being controlled from Singapore. But what had begun to grow clear only in the last week was that Singapore might be the next victim of volcanic aggression. It was this that Waverly told Napoleon Solo.

Napoleon sucked his breath in sharply when his chief suggested the possibility, and gazed blankly at the short wave radio as if it might be the old warhorse himself, his unlit pipe drooping out of the corner of his bloodhoundlike face, eyes sad with a kind of perpetual contemplation of calamity. Behind Napoleon, April burst out with, "But there are millions of people in Singapore—"

"Is that April?" Waverly asked in response to the girl's high voice.

"Yes, sir," Napoleon said.

"You may tell her that we're aware of Singapore's population. But just as important, we're aware of THRUSH'S total indifference to the lives of millions if the stakes are big enough. In this case the stakes are the souls of billions—that is to say, control of all the world's governments. At this moment, so far as we've been able to conclude, THRUSH is establishing volcanic centers in key locations around the globe.

"We've little idea about their whereabouts specifically, because we've no instruments for detecting the Dacian device. But our Singapore headquarters has been tracking down the sources of cables and other communications to THRUSH and the conspiracy appears to be global.

"I have Illya working on a system to detect and destroy volcano boxes, but I can't count on its being perfected in time, even if it's developed at all. There are too may unknowns, so we have to aim at the source and try to stop the head man from giving the signal to detonate the volcanoes. And of course, we have to find Dacian."

"To your knowledge, sir, are the volcano boxes fully operational?"

"I suspect they are not. But I believe intense pressure, if not torture, is being applied to Dacian to disclose his formula for a key element in the boxes. In anticipation of his yielding, the boxes, minus the key element, are being installed. The moment he relents the element will be mass produced and set into the boxes. That is why it is imperative to find Dacian. I am almost certain he is in Singapore."

"But what makes you think Singapore is next on THRUSH'S agenda?"

"Well, it happens that Sarabando, that nice little tyrant who wiped out Tapwana, has suggested to the government of Singapore that its presence in the Federation would be most welcome. More significant, Sarabando has hinted that Singapore's refusal to come into the Federation would be regarded as an unfriendly if not hostile act.

"I will not go into the political implications now, though I'm sure you can figure most of them out for yourself. It only needs be said that those implications are worldwide. If Singapore is destroyed, no other government will resist a THRUSH demand for surrender. The volcanic weapon will simply be too potent for any sensible government to resist."

"Just one question. Why destroy Singapore if that's where THRUSH is basing its operations?"

"Singapore," Waverly explained, "is a highly strategic location. It's a valuable port and its position, in relation to the Boruvian Federation, gives THRUSH an unbroken chain of control in that part of the Pacific Ocean. So they will, if necessary, destroy it and move their headquarters elsewhere.

"You have to understand, Napoleon, that Dacian is being forced to make one of his secret elements at a time, but THRUSH is going to try to blackmail the world by claiming it has the formula and can make as many of them as it wants. And remember, if Dacian talks, THRUSH *will* be able to make as many operational volcano boxes as it wants. So you must proceed to Singapore at once, locate Kae Soong and Dacian, and capture or kill."

"Any hint of their specific location?"

"SINGOIL, Napoleon. That is their cable address, but we've been unable to ascertain how they pick up their messages. If you can do that, it will lead you to Kae Soong."

They signed off and Napoleon turned to April. The muscles of her jaw were rigid with tension, and her brow deeply furrowed as if she were in pain.

Napoleon, thinking it was only the news from U.N.C.L.E. headquarters that was disturbing her, was about to speak when April Dancer silenced him.

He held his breath and the muscles of his legs tightened in expectation of fast movement. She was straining her ears, and her eyes darted to the left as she heard a bird screeching.

Napoleon Solo tiptoed over to her.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"My guards haven't signaled as they're supposed to, every half hour. Instead I've been hearing—it could be a macaw, but... Come this way."

She moved towards a bamboo panel in the side of the hut, which she gingerly removed. She fell to her hands and knees and crept out after looking both ways. Napoleon followed, and after exiting paused beside her. April reached under a pile of leaves and drew out a pair of machetes.

They crept along the side of the hut and peered cautiously around the corner. It was pitch black, but a dim glow from the doorway of the hut highlighted a few objects directly in front of it.

One of these was a skinny oriental with machete raised. The machete was bloody. He stood poised before the doorway, as if to strike down anyone who emerged from it. Then Napoleon caught the glint of something metallic a few feet away from the intruder, and his eyes at last made out the shape of a second one bearing what might be a grenade.

After a moment the grenade-bearer crept up to the doorway of the hut, and behind him appeared yet another oriental, a loincloth his only piece of clothing. He came to a stealthy halt.

The obvious plan was for the second to toss his bomb, and for the others to position themselves in such a way that any survivors would be slain as they emerged. Napoleon nudged April and nodded with his chin in the direction of the grenade-bearer. She was to take care of him, and he would tackle the other two.

The second intruder released the silvery object, and as he did April and Napoleon rushed them. A pop and hissing noise told them it hadn't been a grenade but a *teargas* canister, and as they covered the ten yards between themselves and their antagonists their nostrils caught the pungent odor of the gas seeping out of the hut.

They took the intruders completely by surprise. The bomb-thrower reached for a gun, but April's machete lashed across his shoulder. He cried out hideously as blood gouted out of the wound. The nearest oriental with the machete whirled around but had scarcely brought his blade back when Napoleon's caught him fiercely on the neck. The other man was ready for Napoleon and lashed quickly at his exposed left side, but the agent twisted out of the way and warded off a backhand swipe of the blade as the attacker tried to get him coming back.

For an instant they squared off, and it looked as if it would be an even duel. But April had now freed herself and was making ready to join the fray. In matters of world defense, two-to-one odds were not unfair. But as the oriental glanced at April, Napoleon lunged, catching him off his guard, and slashed at his mid-section.

He dropped his machete to defend the blow, and the ring of crossed blades raised a violent chatter of jungle birds. Napoleon brought his foot up and caught the swordsman in the kidney. He yelped in pain, but it was the last noise he was to make, for with immense speed Napoleon brought the razor tip of his weapon up into the man's throat, and he dropped, dying, at Solo's feet.

"We can't stay here any longer," April panted. "I must go back into the hut to destroy the radio and some documents."

"You'll come with me to Singapore," Napoleon said. "Now hurry. I don't know how many more of these guys there are, and how much time it will take for them to get here."

Out of a compartment in her belt she removed a piece of cloth as fine as silk and placed it over her nose and mouth. It was a filter which folded into a package as big as a sugar cube.

Protected against the gas, she went into the hut and came out a few minutes later with the radio and some papers. They ventured into the jungle for twenty or thirty yards, then destroyed the radio by pulling out its vitals and twisting the dials so that even if the radio were found no one would know what wavelength it was on. They buried it and burned the documents beside it. Then they care fully covered everything with dirt and leaves and headed towards the beach.

When they got there, April's guide lay slumped over a gunwale, his head almost separated from his body by a vicious machete blow, and the bottom of the boat had been stove in with heavy stones.

April Dancer ran down the beach to a point where the island cut sharply inland. As they rounded a point they stopped abruptly and spied a sailboat guarded by another oriental.

"I knew this is where it would be," she whispered, drawing out a gun and slipping a silencer over the muzzle. She aimed it at the man guarding the boat, and as the gun hissed he dropped.

"I knew they'd place their boat here to sneak up on yours," she explained once they'd shoved off and were making for open sea, "and the footsteps in the sand showed that I was right."

Napoleon took out his communicator and signaled the ship off shore to send a launch to pick them up. The cool leeward breeze carried them quickly to their destination.

TWO

THE GOVERNMENT of Singapore had read Sarabando's letter with barely stifled amusement. The dictator of the almost invisible little federation of islands to the south was extending to one of the primary centers of trade in the Asian complex an "invitation" to join, in exchange for certain privileges and prerogatives.

With elaborate oriental politeness the government had declined the invitation, explaining that its commitments to other interests made it more feasible to keep its hands untied.

Under any other circumstances such a rejection would have satisfied an insolent petty tyrant like Sarabando. But a week later he issued another invitation to Singapore. This time, cheerfully and patiently, he explained that the honorable governors of the city must have misunderstood his first note. That initial invitation was not so much a cordial expression of good will as it was a subtle suggestion of the unpleasant consequences that might follow if Singapore held out.

So, in case Singapore did not clearly get the implied message, Sarabando spelled it out a little more explicitly.

This note too provoked mirth in the cabinet of this queen of Southeast Asia, except for the response of one minister, who was convinced that Sarabando had a weapon of grave potential, and believed that the dreadful spectacle of Tapwana's volcanic destruction had been no accident.

But his pleas were rejected by his colleagues, and though Sarabando's final message—an undisguisedly severe warning—caused some serious discussion in the higher echelons of the government, no serious measures were considered to defend against, let alone look into, Sarabando's "ravings."

A few days after the diplomatic positions jelled Kae Soong made his appearance in the secret Singapore laboratory of Edward Dacian. Dacian, who had never carried much meat on his bones, had become gaunt and stringy. His hands shook and his muscles twitched, and he had begun to blink frequently.

"I understand you are in the final stage of preparing the liquid reflectors," the chunky, tall THRUSH agent said to him.

"Y—yes, if my hands will stop trembling long enough."

"Why are you so nervous?"

"Hungry, tired."

"You're being mistreated?"

The scientists nodded jerkily.

"You know why, don't you?"

Again Dacian nodded.

"Would it not be easier, then, simply to let us have the formula for the reflectors? Then we would require no further work from you, and we would send you some place pleasant where you would dine well and sleep and never trouble with formulas."

"Heaven," Dacian said.

"You must realize that we are on the verge of deducing your formula anyway. We know what materials you have been using, we even know their measurements and combinations, and it is only a matter of time before we put together our own."

It was sheer bluff, for in spite of all attempts to assess the work Dr. Dacian was doing, his captors hadn't the slightest idea where to begin. Once they had entered the laboratory after Dacian left it for the night, and taken samples of the material he had created, by the next morning Dacian told them that by so tampering with it they had altered its nature, and he would have to start all over. Whether it was true or not, Dacian knew how to play the game of bluff as well as they.

"Why are you letting them kill you by inches?" Kae Soong asked as if "they" were on one side and Soong was on Dacian's. "If you would only be reasonable they would release you from this torture and roil."

"I'm down, not out," said Dacian in one of those American phrases which made little sense to the Oriental mind.

"You mean you will not alter your course?"

"I agreed—one device at a time," Dacian droned, his eyes shutting involuntarily, then snapping open.

"I don't know if they will tolerate such tardy progress any longer. There is too much at stake."

"Learn my formula, then kill me. But you won't learn any more from me."

Trembling almost as if palsied, the scientist returned to his worktable where, crouching over his formulas to prevent televised eavesdropping, he continued his painstaking development of the key device for the next volcano box.

The location for the next eruption had been tentatively settled on the week before. The island of Singapore is for the most part a low and of twenty or thirty feet above sea level, but the central portion is a granite formation dominated by a mountain called Bukit Timah.

It is not high as mountains go, and is really more of a hill than anything else, being less than 600 feet high. Nevertheless its position is enough to radiate destruction in all directions, and a volcanic eruption there would have at least disruptive, and probably critical, effects on rail, shipping and air traffic. And if the eruption were of greater intensity than calculations predicted, the effects would carry into the city itself, with its magnificent skyline and superb harbor facilities.

Bukit Timah, then, was the location of THRUSH'S next display and possibly its last. It was beginning to look dubious that Dacian would ever reveal his formula, and even less likely that he would survive to make the reflectors for even one more box. The threat of suicide became a consideration now. Though Dacian was a coward, his suffering could reach the point where he would be performing a kindness to himself to take his life.

And to his physical suffering must be added the mental torture of realizing that his device was responsible for countless lives lost and an unimaginable number of lives threatened.

But THRUSH was not as disturbed over the prospect of losing or killing Dacian as it could have been. It was planning to use the destruction of Singapore as the key chess piece in its game of world domination. Kae Soong and his colleagues had hoped that the destruction of Tapwana would be a broad enough hint to the nations of the planet that failure to heed a THRUSH warning would result in a spasm of volcanic fury.

But obviously the hint hadn't been broad enough. Some people were convinced that Tapwana's destruction, after rebelling against the Boruvian Federation, was strictly a coincidence. A similar event on Singapore, however, would leave no doubt in anyone's mind. Nor would anyone wonder how far THRUSH would go in its bid for conquest.

Thus, when Singapore fell, THRUSH would issue its warning to the governments of the world, and none, witnessing the awful havoc wreaked on the island-nation, would be able to resist. Without the possession of another volcano box, THRUSH could nevertheless secure its goals.

On Bukit Timah, a pair of observers emerged from a helicopter and examined the structure of the ground. On the north side evidence of a great fissure in the granite suggested itself to their trained eyes, and a series of tests confirmed it. It was here that Dacian's next volcano box would be placed.

ACT VI

A NETWORK OF SATELLITES

ILLYA KURYAKIN and Frieda Winter had spent almost every minute together in the two days since his arrival at the Texas laboratory. But by the end of the second day they were no nearer a solution than they'd been at the beginning of the first.

There were two problems: to devise a way of locating volcano boxes, and to devise a way of destroying them once they were spotted. The first difficulty arose out of the fact that the Dacian machine emitted no special radiation,

either while in operation or while dormant. True, it did project the polarized light of a laser beam when it was activated, but all of that light was directed downward into the earth, and could not therefore be detected by a conventional scanning device.

And because it did not utilize an excessive amount of electricity—in fact, it could operate on a self-contained power-pack attached to a gas generator—it could not be traced by means of its drain on conventional sources of electricity.

Of course, the workings of a volcano device might eventually be ascertained by seismograph, but that would probably make it too late, for the laser would probably bore into the magma beneath the earth's mantle a mere hour or two after causing an earthquake.

And even if you could locate a volcano box in advance of the final stage of destructiveness, there were still the problems of reaching and destroying it.

Illya said dourly, "We've been sitting in this room for eight hours. Why don't we go out and get some fresh air? Maybe it will clear our heads and help us think."

"I'd love to," Frieda said, sliding her hand into the crook of his arm.

They strolled out along the edge of the little pond in front of the building. It was a clear, crisp night, with stars blazing silver in the black night, and only a few puffs of black cloud scudding in front of the moon. They sat down on a bench and watched the ripples in the pond send charming designs through the reflection of the sky.

Illya looked up and named some constellations. As he was talking about the summer sky Frieda moved closer and put her head on his shoulder. He gulped but kept talking, trying to ignore the warm presence of her dark hair near his neck.

"Look," he said suddenly, turning his head towards the southeastern sky. Frieda turned her face up and followed the line of his out stretched hand to a tiny white dot moving slowly and steadily to wards the northeast.

"A planet?" she asked.

"No. It's moving too fast. It's either a satellite or a plane."

"How beautiful," she said.

Illya cleared his throat and rose. "Say, I'd like another look at Dacian's gadget. Do you think we could get into the compound?"

Frieda Winter sighed. "I suppose so. You really don't let anything stand in the way of your job, do you?"

She went through the steps involved to admit them into the com pound without setting off the alarms, and they passed into the grounds where the scaffolding stood. It seemed to float in the sky, silhouetted against the graceful clouds that drifted before the moon.

As they stood there Illya realized that the heat generating from the shaft blasted by the device was causing the air over the scaffold to ripple. The moon and stars seemed to shimmer as they were being seen in a pond. The effect was weird and hypnotizing.

All at once, as he let his associations drift, an answer came to him and he snapped his fingers. "A satellite!"

Frieda looked up, searching the sky for the object that had passed across it a few minutes earlier.

"We'll find them by satellite," Illya elaborated, leaving Frieda as much perplexed as before.

"What are you talking about?"

"The box does emit one kind of radiation: heat. The way to locate one in operation is through infrared scanners. The moment one of Dacian's devices is activated we can detect it with infrared. And what better way is there to do that than via satellite? We already have several in orbit geared to pick stellar sources of infrared, and one trained on Russia and Southeast Asia to locate possible atomic explosions or rocket blast-offs. So we'll train our

surveillance satellites on possible volcano sites. Come on. I want to get in touch with headquarters at once."

They hastened back to the laboratory, where Illya Kuryakin communicated with Waverly.

"Very good," the chief said as he digested Illya's report. "We'll start work on it immediately and try to line up a detection system. But what about locating the boxes before they're activated? And what about destroying them after they're activated?"

"We're still trying to figure something out on the former, but at least we have an instant way of locating the boxes once they're turned on. As for destroying them, what about missiles?"

"Negative," Waverly said. We need to send personnel to the site to ascertain that it is a Dacian device and not some other disturbance. Besides, a missile would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. We don't want to destroy a city while trying to save it."

"In other words, once we've picked up a site on the orbital scanners, we have to verify it and destroy it in person."

"Correct. I always prefer to use something more dependable than human resources," Waverly said, "but if we can't figure out anything better we'll proceed with that line of defense."

Within moments after Waverly concluded his conversation with Illya, he was exerting his prodigious influence to cut through red tape in the space program bureaucracy, and quickly arranged for special signals to be sent to those satellites equipped with infrared detection equipment.

One of the satellites passed over the southern United States, and trained its sensors on the thermal turbulence created by Dacian's experimental device. It relayed its information to analysts on the ground who computed the special mathematical coordinates of this manmade volcanic device. Once they had determined the unique infrared characteristics of a volcano box in

action, they could signal a program to other satellites equipped with infrared gear.

This was done promptly, and within six hours a network of satellites was observing the earth, especially the Asian sector, with instructions to alert ground observers the moment a thermal pattern was detected which matched the one in Texas.

Illya Kuryakin was rewarding himself with a few hours of sleep when a signal from Waverly aroused him. Dreamily he reached for his communicator and murmured a sleep-slurred acknowledgement.

"I want you to proceed to Singapore at once," Waverly ordered abruptly.

"Singapore?"

"Mr. Solo is there, and we have good reason to believe that that's where the action will be. I will brief you more thoroughly once you're aloft. Instruct Miss Winter and the rest of the staff at the laboratory to keep working on a better detection and destruction system than the one we now have, and to phone me as soon as they come up with something. But we'll have to make do with what we now have until then, and I need your services in Singapore."

As soon as they'd signed off Illya threw his personal effects into a kit bag. He slid into his jacket and signaled an agent in San Antonio to make arrangements for an U.N.C.L.E. jet to be ready to take off for Singapore as soon as Illya's plane arrived from the laboratory.

He scurried down the hail and knocked on Frieda's door.

"I'm going," he announced calmly.

She thrust her lower lip forward in a sad pout. "So soon? We haven't really —"

"You're to keep working on a solution and to call this number and ask for this man as soon as you have something." He handed her a slip of paper.

She put her fingers on his cheek. "You haven't shaved."

"I never shave for the end of the world," he said.

"Oh Illya—come back when you've done your job." She threw her arms around his neck and put her lips to his cheek.

He ran his fingers through her auburn hair, wondering if it were the last feminine thing he would ever know.

TWO

THE BIG PLANE settled on to the strip at Tengah Airfield and a moment later its back-up system roared, braking the forward momentum of the plane and sending a flock of tropical birds screeching angrily into the sky. Illya Kuryakin looked out of the portal and saw very little activity, which was the way he preferred it.

In the briefing Alexander Waverly had advised landing at Tengah, a military airport controlled principally by the British R.A.F., instead of at Kallang. The latter was closer to the city of Singapore, but was a civil airfield, and Illya didn't want to risk recognition.

A long ride from Tengah to the city was to be preferred to assassination at Kallang. But after the long, arduous plane trip Illya was no longer sure which was the more desirable.

Waverly had instructed him quite thoroughly on every aspect of his mission. In essence, Illya was to contact Napoleon and exchange information, but they were strictly prohibited from meeting. Waverly wanted them to act independently to cut down the risk of their collective capture. Napoleon had April Dancer to serve in whatever capacity Napoleon thought best.

They had two primary objectives. The first, and most important, was to locate Dacian and his captors and destroy the formulas, equipment, and personnel before an aggressive action could be taken. But if that were not possible, they were to wait for Waverly's signal indicating that a satellite

had detected a volcano box in action. They were to rush to the site and take whatever measures necessary to put the machine out of commission. They were to play it by ear, and to use whatever transportation and weaponry the circumstances called for.

"There is one aspect of this," Waverly had concluded, "that I cannot emphasize enough. Namely, that you will have between twelve and forty-eight hours to pinpoint and destroy the box from the moment of detection."

"Yes, sir," Illya said, instinctively looking at his watch.

NAPOLEON HAD arranged for April Dancer to check into a small hotel downtown and to pass herself off as a tourist. She was eminently skilled as a linguist and could therefore submerge herself in the market place and listen without anyone suspecting she understood. There were several clubs and bars where underworld elements and spies hung out and, picking up an unsuspecting American tourist named Don Wirts, she made him take her to these places for drinks. She kept her eyes and ears open, while murmuring the usual hare-brained tourist clichés to her escort.

Napoleon, in the meantime, had made a number of attempts to find out the names of the principals of Singapore Oil, and the company's address. *Singoil* was its cable address, and this THRUSH front had been the clearing house for communications involving the volcano plot. But all of his inquiries, discreet and otherwise, had availed him nothing. *Singoil* was a completely false company with nothing indeed but a cable address. Furthermore, the messages received by the cable company were neither delivered nor picked up. Several times a day a man would call and in fair English, say, "This is *Singoil*; please read any messages." And so there was apparently no way to trace the principals.

Napoleon was walking off his frustration at quayside when Illya buzzed him.

"I'm in town," the Russian in formed him with the bland understatement of a fraternity brother checking in at a conference. "What's up?"

"The rats are far underground," Napoleon said. "I can't trace *Singoil* for all the tea in this part of the world, which is considerable." He explained the efforts he'd made so far.

"How about sending them a message which must be delivered in person?"

"They'll know it's a trap," Napoleon protested.

"Exactly. You'll let yourself walk into it, and that'll lead you to our playmates."

"It's a beautiful idea, and I thought of it before you did, but there's one thing wrong. Suppose, instead of capturing me alive for interrogation, they simply decide to gun me down on sight."

"That would be unsportsmanlike like," Illya said. "But I don't think they'd kill you until they knew what's brought you here, how much you know, and how much you've told other people."

"That's comforting," said Napoleon Solo, chuckling.

"Let April Dancer follow you. When the tag is made, she'll be right behind you. She can contact me and we'll drop in on the party before the firecrackers go off."

Napoleon reflected for a moment. "If you think it's such a fool proof idea, why don't you serve as decoy?"

"I'm too young," Illya explained.

It was arranged. The only hitch was that Don, April Dancer's escort, had grown intensely attached to her, and she couldn't shake him. Don Wirts was a burly Californian with plenty of money and a lusty passion to see and do everything. He was boisterous, yet innocuous and pliant, and he agreeably escorted her everywhere she directed. But this morning he would be in the way, and it took an act of considerable rudeness to make him go away.

April went to a ladies' room and, as soon as she was out of his sight, rushed into the noisy street of Singapore.

April took a taxi to the docks on Keppel Harbor and got out a few blocks away from the cable office. At 10:30 she saw Napoleon going into the office. He paused a second to look for her and, satisfying himself as he glimpsed her shock of ash-blonde hair, he entered it. Then he emerged after a minute, crossed the street and entered a bar.

April felt uncomfortably exposed here, for it seemed unlikely that a pretty, unescorted lady tourist would hang around the harbor longer than she had to. An hour passed, but at last there were results.

A messenger boy, in white ducks and a greasy, torn undershirt, entered the cable office and exited a second later. He crossed the street, went into the bar, and came out with Napoleon behind him. He looked around to make sure he wasn't being followed, but April had made herself invisible behind some huge baskets of fish.

Napoleon Solo was ushered to an old English Ford and pushed in unceremoniously. April signaled her taxi, which had been parked up a side street, and she took off after the Ford. She kept a respectable distance behind, but kept a special channel of her communicator open until she was relieved to hear a beeping sound on it. Good. Napoleon had planted a tiny transmitter in the car, and she would not have to keep the car in sight in order to track it down.

Nevertheless April didn't want to lose visual track yet, because she hoped to glimpse the men who had abducted Napoleon. The Ford made its way into the marketplace on the north side of town, where foot traffic was so heavy that the cars bogged down in a sea of orientals.

April observed three men getting out with Napoleon, and she quickly paid off her driver and leaped out of the taxi. She couldn't make out any faces, but by jumping up from time to time she could follow the four men as they wended their way through the throng. Then she got a chance to close in as the foursome ran into some sort of demonstration in the street, and the crowd in front of her momentarily thinned. But just as she was about to exploit her advantage she felt a strong hand close around her arm.

April Dancer's instincts directed her to bring her arm up to break the lock, then grab her assailant around the neck and drop to one knee. But while her nerves were tensing for the judo throw she recognized the voice. It was Don Wirts' drawl. "I thought for sure you'd been carried away by white slavers. I been looking all over creation for you, honey!"

His simple, grinning face blocked her view of Napoleon. "You lug, get out of my way." She thrust him aside and jumped up to see if her quarry were still visible. But Napoleon and his guardians were gone.

If it hadn't been a matter of life or death. April would have found Don's expression of injured dismay laughable. And if it weren't so genuine she might have suspected him of engineering this encounter. But no, he wasn't a THRUSH agent. He was simply a well-meaning oaf whose solicitude for her just might bring about the destruction of Singapore.

THREE

THE FIRST THING Napoleon Solo had done when ushered into the English Ford was hook a barbed, miniaturized radio transmitter on the pants of the man next to him. It was practically invisible, but it didn't have to be very big, for all it did was emit a steady beeping. It could do so for weeks. Napoleon prayed that the man was not planning to change his clothes immediately.

Seconds after taking this precaution he felt, as he'd expected, the jab of a hypodermic needle in his arm, and without hesitation an anesthetic—probably sodium pentathol—swept over his consciousness like the waves of the sea.

When he revived he'd been stripped and dressed in a pair of white pajamas. He was on a cot in a cell, looking into the round face of the man bearing the signal transmitter. Napoleon let his eyes wander to the man's pants, and the tiny silver nodule, looking like a feathery seed clinging to the fabric, was still there.

The man pointed a rather lethal looking Mauser at Napoleon's eyes, and gestured with it towards the open cell door, outside which stood another guard. The agent cleared his head, rose unsteadily, and staggered out.

They led him down a shiny, white-plastered corridor and into a dim chamber with a desk, some chairs, and a circle of oriental guards in white pajamas, the snouts of their Sten guns trained on choice parts of Napoleon's anatomy.

Behind the desk sat a powerfully built man with slanted eyes, straight dark hair, and an expression of monumental confidence.

"Kae Soong, I presume," said Napoleon.

The man smiled. "You would be Mr. Solo, if my dossiers don't deceive me."

Napoleon did not acknowledge.

"Mr. Solo, I would like to know why you have permitted yourself to be trapped."

"I wanted to meet you."

"You now have that pleasure. But am I unduly suspicious in suggesting you have your associates following you?"

"They aren't following me, but I'm sure they're looking for me."

"I prefer to think your organization is not as haphazard as that. Acting on that assumption, I have prepared a welcome for any that dare think my headquarters are an open house." He scanned Napoleon's eyes for a reaction but found none to raise his hopes. "But it is of no consequence. This place will be abandoned tomorrow morning. Our work is done. Mr. Solo, now that you've located me, I imagine you must be brimming with questions."

"Only one. Where is Edward Dacian?"

"In our custody. In fact, he occupies the cell next to yours. If you would like to share his cell, we'll gladly accommodate you. I'm afraid you won't find

his company terribly stimulating, however. He's rather dull these days. But he'll liven up, as the saying goes, when he sees the fireworks display we've planned for the city of Singapore."

"I guess it goes without saying that I'm invited too."

"Oh," smiled Kae Soong, "your presence is indispensable to its success. Although if you did miss this one, you would still have an opportunity to see many more around the world. We have a large number of them planned for the near future."

"Then Dacian—"

"Has told us everything." He nodded at his captive as if to conclude the interview. "There is much to be done, so if you'll excuse me—"

He rose, and Napoleon's arms were gripped by the strong hands of two guards. He was led, almost carried, back to the cell block, but this time was thrown into an occupied room. It took a minute to adjust his eyes to the darkness, but when he finally could make out the bundle on the cot next to the far wall he was appalled. The features belonged to Edward Dacian, but the emaciated body and hollow countenance belonged to a survivor of a concentration camp.

FOUR

AFTER IDENTIFYING and introducing herself over the communicator, April told Illya of her progress in locating Napoleon Solo. "I found the car and watched it for four hours, but nobody claimed it. I have someone watching it now, but I can't just sit around and wait. Who knows how long it will be before they go back to the car—and how can we be sure the car belongs to THRUSH at all?"

Illya held silence for a moment, then asked, "What makes you think he attached the transmitter to the car?"

She pursued her lips as if struck by a revelation. "I don't know—I just assumed—"

"Let's assume that's an illogical assumption," Illya said, "and go on from there. We tag cars only when we can't tag people. The reason is obvious. Cars can be abandoned permanently or for long periods of time. So we try to hook our tracers onto individuals. How close are you to the car?"

"A few blocks away."

"Follow the beeps and see if they lead to the car."

April did as Kuryakin suggested, and when she got to the car, where she'd left Don in attendance, she signaled Illya. "I'm ashamed to say it—"

"We don't have time to be ashamed. Follow the signal as far as is safe, then buzz me again when you've located the source. Is that Don still with you?"

"He's looking at me now as if I'm a madwoman."

"Get rid of him immediately."

Don Wirts' mouth was wide open.

"You're a policewoman!" he gasped. "You're a spy, I'll bet. That's why—"

"I've no time to explain," April Dancer said, "but if you want to do your country a service, continue to watch this car and I'll contact you as soon as I can. If you see anyone get into it, remember what he looks like and follow him. But keep out of trouble."

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, and then added, as April fled down an alley way, "I hope she's on the good side."

Like a bloodhound baying after a strong scent, April followed the twists of Singapore's streets according to the strengths and weaknesses of the signal on her receiver. The beeping grew louder as she approached what seemed to be a complex of city administration buildings, and when she entered a small plaza the intensity of the beeps confirmed that she'd closed in on her quarry.

Even if she'd had no receiver, the presence of two sinister Chinese outside a two-story, white-brick edifice would have told her she'd found what she was looking for. April communicated her location to Illya.

"Does it look assailable?" he asked.

"There's a steel fence with spikes around the building, two guards in front. No fire escape visible, but I'll go around the back for a look."

"Proceed on your own. I'll await your signal. If I don't hear from you in two hours I'm going to join the party."

She backed out of the alley that led onto the plaza and decided to approach the hideout from another direction. She walked around what she hoped was the perimeter of the plaza, and then headed back in on a narrow street on which small crowds of peasants were engaged in bargaining over fish and vegetables.

Night had settled over the city, and to the south one could see the neon glare of the downtown section. But this area was relatively dim, and the scene was made even more macabre by the whitish glare of gas lamps under which the peasants' wares were displayed.

When April emerged on the plaza she realized she was in a better position to approach the house unseen. A tree towered over the fence, and though it was some thing of a shinny to get to the lowest branch, she fancied she could do it. She put a dark shawl over her ash-blonde hair and strolled casually past the tree.

As soon as April Dancer was under the branch she leaped up and caught the limb with one hand. Her other hand swiped at it but missed, and she dangled helplessly for a moment. Then her loose hand closed around the bark of the trunk and she lifted herself by dint of her fingernails alone.

Her right arm was stretched to its limit, but now with the boost of her other hand she managed to get some leverage. April's calves and knees and heels pushed downward until she was reasonably certain a second swipe with her

left hand would not be unsuccessful. In one motion she let go of the trunk and grabbed for the limb.

She felt the satisfying thump of the limb in her palm, then pulled with all her might until her torso had cleared the branch. Then April collapsed on it and hung there to catch her breath, looking like a rug placed over a clothesline to be beaten.

As soon as she was able to clear a deep breath, she dropped into the backyard of the house. There was a flagstone patio connected to the house by means of a kind of thatched walk. Stealthily she approached the door at the end of the walk. It was a French door with brass handles, and heavy shades in front of the glass made it impossible for her to see inside.

She tested the knobs, but the door was locked. To an agent teethed on the art of burglary, a locked door presented no problem, and reference to a tool kit skillfully concealed around her waist produced the antidote readily enough.

April Dancer pushed the door open slowly, but as soon as she'd ascertained she was entering a dark room she plunged inside and shut the door behind her. After a few seconds she could ascertain the outlines of a laboratory. She tiptoed to the door on the other side of the room, peeked out, and saw two armed guards outside a door.

From behind that door April could make out the unmistakable voice of Napoleon Solo. At length it opened and he was led out down a corridor, and, from what her ears could tell her, down a stairway.

She waited a few minutes and was about to decide on her next move when an acquired sense told her she was making a mistake The entry into the house had been too easy. It just didn't make sense that an operation of cataclysmic magnitude would be so shoddily protected.

April tiptoed back to the French doors and peered out. Her heart thumped violently as she saw that her suspicions were correct. There was a veritable cordon of white-clad orientals around the house.

She reasoned that the room from which Napoleon Solo had been led away was an interrogation room and possibly the office where a key THRUSH agent—possibly even Kae Soong himself—was ensconced. If so there was only one possible way of getting out of this place with Napoleon. She'd have to take a high-ranking hostage.

The move was daring. Its beauty was in its very audacity. The interrogation room was guarded by two big men with sub-machineguns, and heavens knew how many men were behind the door. She would have to rely on the element of surprise.

April Dancer fitted a silencer over a .32 pistol, and in her left hand she clutched a *teargas* capsule of the kind just issued by U.N.C.L.E.—instant and potent.

She flung open the door and squeezed off two shots in one deadly fluid motion. The two guards scarcely lifted their guns before her bullets slammed into their vitals. Even as they were crumpling to the floor April was charging across the corridor and bursting through the door they guarded.

Kae Soong was sitting behind his desk, and behind him stood a minor assistant in the process of unfurling a chart. As she charged into the room Kae's hand darted automatically for an automatic on his desk, but April's gun was blazing and kicked up a hail of splinters that made him pull back in fright. He turned to his assistant, but this diminutive Malaccan was already reeling from a bullet in the chest.

Kae Soong glared at her. "You are mad!"

"Never mind the formalities. Take me immediately to my friend or I'll drop you right now."

"This is a futile gesture," he sighed, edging from behind his desk. "We've admitted you intentionally, but the doors have shut firmly behind you. You cannot escape. Do with me what you like."

As she stepped over the bodies of the guards in the hail she said, "They need you, Kae Soong, and without you this operation is going to fall on its face."

"I'm afraid nothing could be further from the truth. You people never comprehend how lightly we weigh an individual life against the survival of the organization. Nothing would be impaired, nothing delayed by my removal."

"Then suppose I remove you right now," April said, thrusting the snout of her gun's silencer in his spine.

"You're welcome to do so, but I don't think you will, since I am your passport."

They passed through the door to the stairwell, where she'd seen them take Napoleon.

The stairs curved away to the left, and she cautiously made her way down with her hostage in front of her.

At the foot of the stairs was a corridor with four doors of heavy steel facing on it. At the end of it was a guard, and April could assume that just inside this doorway there would be another. A beam of light across it told her an electric eye would set off an alarm as soon as she crossed it.

She poked Kae Soong and pointed at the beam.

As he called out to the guard nearest them to turn off the beam she quickly reloaded her gun and removed from her kit four sodium vapor explosive charges. The guard acknowledged Kae Soong's order and the beam went out. April shoved her captive forward and as soon as he was clear she squeezed a bullet into the near guard, then into the one at the far end of the corridor.

As the latter spun around from the impact he fell across a beam at that station and an alarm bell sent strident signals throughout the building.

"Which one?" she demanded of Kae Soong, pointing to the four doors of the cells. The THRUSH agent looked at her stonily. "All right, we'll do it this way." She slapped a charge on the lock of each door, then triggered an ignition mechanism.

A few seconds later the corridor was rocked by four blasts like the sound of a wrecker's ball failing on the beam of a ship. The metal doors were blown off their hinges and hung from their frames at bizarre angles. For a moment no one emerged from any of them. April Dancer peered into the first two, which were empty.

Then Napoleon Solo, shaking his head, staggered out of the third.

In a glance he realized what had happened and rushed back into his cell to get Dacian. April, meanwhile, went to the fourth cell but it too was empty.

The corridor was filled with acrid smoke and the alarm bell made an intimidating din. Kae Soong stood passively, doing all he could to resist his captor without risking his murder and waiting for a chance to outsmart them. Napoleon came out of his cell bearing Dacian in a fireman's carry.

April Dancer pressed into Napoleon's free hand another vapor bomb and a *teargas* capsule and, shoving the reluctant Kae Soong ahead of them, went back up the stairs. But they were halfway up when the door at the top opened and they were confronted by an arsenal of machineguns. The tapping of footsteps behind them meant that Kae's goons had come down the other stairwell and would soon be behind them.

Napoleon Solo threw his teargas capsule down at the foot of the stairs and it burst into foul-smelling fumes. April shoved her gun deep into Kae's back and ordered him to tell his men to clear a path or she would shoot him at once.

Kae Soon called out, but his command brought forth an explosion of gas that felt as if a rod had been shoved into their brains.

April saw Napoleon's knees buckle, and realized that Kae had ordered his men to gas them all, including himself, but before she could pull the trigger

the sickly sweet odor carried her off into a world of nightmares.

ACT VII

LAST ANSWER

WHEN WAVERLY told Illya Kuryakin to forget about Napoleon, the agent's throat constricted as if' he was going to cry. "But, sir—"

"Mr. Kuryakin, I'm quite well aware of his value to this organization, but like any other member he is expendable if circumstances call for his sacrifice. The reason I enjoined you from teaming up is that I cannot afford to lose both of you.

"It would be a pity if we have lost him and Miss Dancer, but it would be calamitous if we tossed you into the bargain too. You must leave them to fight their way out of imprisonment alone. But I want you free to act on an instant's notice in a matter infinitely larger. I expect news from our satellite momentarily. So please stand by and do nothing about Mr. Solo or Miss Dancer. That is an order."

Illya Kuryakin collapsed into an armchair. It was almost dawn and he'd been awaiting a signal from Napoleon or April for three hours.

This perhaps was the ugliest aspect of the work he had to do. In U.N.C.L.E.'s struggle against those who would diminish the value of human life, it was sometimes overlooked that an U.N.C.L.E. agent had to hold life cheap indeed in order to protect the interests of order. What value was law and world tranquility if those defending it had to stand by helplessly as their closest friends were thrown without compunction into the breach?

He was desperately tired, and took advantage of his momentary inactivity to close his eyes and catch some sleep. It seemed as if only a few moments had gone by when the strong sunlight of morning and an insistent signal from his communicator awakened him. He was also conscious of the sounds of shouting and running outside. He switched on his communicator,

as he spoke into it, he sidled to the window to see what the commotion was about.

The scene was one of incredible confusion. People were scurrying in every direction, screaming and shouting and shoving each other down.

The voice on his communicator was that of Alexander Waverly. "Our satellite has picked up an infrared disturbance on the island of Singapore. This is it, Mr. Kuryakin."

"Evidently the populace knows something's going on. There's a riot here."

"The Boruvian Federation has issued a twenty-four hour ultimatum. Singapore must join or it will be little more than a pool of lava."

"Have you pinpointed the volcano box?"

"Yes. It's located on a high point at the center, a hill called Bukit Timah. I'll give you the coordinates now."

Waverly read a precise set of longitudinal and latitudinal figures, then added, "The best way to reach it promptly is by helicopter to the north. There's a plateau about half mile away from the summit. The rest must be covered by foot. If you get any closer by helicopter you risk being shot down—if there's anyone there to shoot at you."

"Do you think they've just left the device there and abandoned it?"

"It could be. They don't know we have a way of detecting their device, so they may feel they can switch it on and leave it unattended without fear of discovery until it's too late. On the other hand, if they've issued an ultimatum they must reason that a capitulation by Singapore will make destruction of the island unnecessary.

"So, unless they can shut their device off by remote control, they may remain behind to stop its operation manually. That makes more sense anyway, because if Singapore does capitulate, THRUSH will want to

dismantle the device and remove it. So I think you can expect a welcoming committee. Arm yourself accordingly."

"Yes, sir."

"One last point. We still don't know if THRUSH has the formula for the reflecting elements or not, so it is still in our interest to capture someone who can tell us. Therefore you must not destroy the volcano box site wholesale if there are important personnel there. In brief, you've got to stop the device from going off, but at the same time learn if the formula has fallen into their hands."

Illya Kuryakin shook his head at the incredibly delicate maneuvering he'd have to do to accomplish both goals, and accomplish them alone, and accomplish them within less than twenty-four hours. "Will do," he said, concealing his lack of conviction from his superior officer.

TWO

AS CLOSELY AS he could figure, Napoleon Solo awoke from his gas-induced sleep about four hours after his attempt to break out of the prison beneath the laboratory. The sun was thirty degrees up into the eastern sky, from what he could gather looking out of the slit in a wildly bouncing panel truck. Beside him, jammed awkwardly into a corner on her stomach, was April Dancer, her hair tousled. At his feet was the half-broken body of Edward Dacian.

The truck was progressing uphill over unpaved land, and sometimes soared so high over a bump that the three bodies hung suspended for a moment before striking the metal floor. The ride lasted another half hour. Then the truck stopped and the rear doors were opened. Two guards menaced them with sub-machineguns while two more entered and dragged them out, testing the stiff cord that bound their hands behind their backs.

As the guards set them on their feet they observed their surroundings. They were about fifty yards below the summit of a high hill from which rose, as

if out of a chimney, a geyser of steam. The steam was discolored grey, but from time to time as they gazed at it, it would bear up in its midst some vividly colored cloud of vapor, like a metal being subjected to the flame of a Bunsen burner. The odor was sulfurous, the sound at once a humming, a hissing, and a roaring that grew louder even as they stood still.

The guards appeared somewhat awed and frightened, but they prodded Napoleon Solo and April Dancer upwards, while a third helped Dacian.

After a few moments they had made their way through the scrub at the top of the hill, and saw the volcano box site. At the center of course was the scaffolding and box, but these were almost entirely obscured by steam and smoke. Near them, a couple of helicopters stood with rotors whirling, fanning the steam into hideously lovely patterns. Opposite, a couple of rough huts contained what Napoleon surmised were electrical generating equipment and monitoring systems.

And directly in front of them was the smiling face of Kae Soong.

"My colleagues revived me early so that I could be present at the start of the performance. But you will have the envious distinction of being present at the end of it, while I will be far away. Place them there," he instructed a guard, pointing at the huts.

The guard led Dacian and the two U.N.C.L.E. agents, and made them stand in front of one from which came the throaty sound of a generator. Cables led from it to the steam-shrouded scaffolding. Kae Soong issued some commands, then entered the other hut, which was presumably where the monitors were housed.

When be came out he said, "Another half day and this island will be no more. And after that, who knows? We are so excited with our toy, we don't know what to do with it first."

The wind shifted momentarily and they were drenched in pungent mist. When the breeze abated, Kae Soong was gone and could be seen walking towards one of his engineers. Then Napoleon Solo felt a rough hand on his shoulder. A guard was ordering them to sit against an outcropping of rock

near the generator hut. They did so, and the guard took a stance against a tree, watching them intensely and muscles tensed as if eager for an excuse to cut them down.

Napoleon sat between April and Dr. Dacian. He murmured to April, hoping the guard wouldn't make out what he was saying in the hiss and roar of the volcano box.

"If the wind blows that steam our way again we may have a chance."

"I've been thinking the same, but we still have to get our hands free."

"We can rush the guard with our hands tied. A couple of well-placed heads and knees will take care of him. Then I'll tell you what to do."

Napoleon whispered the rest of his instructions, then braced his legs for a leap the moment the wind shifted. Dacian lay inert, eyes glazed and barely comprehending. Napoleon realized it didn't matter how the scientist came out of this ordeal, dead or alive; his spirit had been broken, and Napoleon had rescued him as much for humanitarian as for strategic reasons.

"What if the wind doesn't shift again?" April asked, thrusting her nose into the fairly stiff prevailing wind that carried the smoke of the blossoming volcano away from them.

"Then we pray that the earth under Singapore is made of green cheese."

Suddenly one of the guards shouted and pointed at the northern sky, and other guards joined in the commotion. Kae Soong came running to a vantage point on the hill and peered across a valley. Napoleon craned his neck to see, but the smoke and steam obscured his view.

"It's a chopper," April said.

"Huh?"

"I hear a helicopter. And I don't think it's one of theirs."

THREE

ILLYA KURYAKIN hovered over a ridge half a mile north of Bukit Timah. The problems were manifold. The only approach to the hill, on the ground, was from the north ridge. All other ground lay below the summit, putting him at an impossible disadvantage since he wouldn't be able to see the device's scaffolding and would be an easy target for marksmen commanding the heights. Air attack was out of the question, because he couldn't get close enough to use his weapons effectively without risking ground fire that would knock him out of the sky.

So it would have to be the north ridge, but that's precisely where the pall of steam and smoke was being blown. Visibility from that approach was almost zero, meaning he'd have to make his way practically to the scaffolding itself to destroy it. It was certain he'd have, as Waverly put it, a welcoming committee long before he got that close.

If only they'd let him blast the summit indiscriminately!

But that might be a fatal mistake. U.N.C.L.E. had to learn with certainty whether THRUSH had the formula for the chief component of the device, and the only way that could be done was either to capture a THRUSH agent or rescue Dr. Dacian.

Illya Kuryakin had no idea whether Dacian was dead or alive, but he was haunted by the realization that the scientist, along with Napoleon Solo and April Dancer, were alive and being held hostage on the summit of Bukit Timah. So he had no choice but to try threading the needle—destroying the volcano box, capturing a THRUSH agent, seeking and rescuing his friends if they were there at all— and keeping himself alive in the bargain.

He shrugged, as if the mission was so ridiculous it had to succeed.

Then Illya set the helicopter down on a granite plateau and stepped out, keeping the rotors whirling against the likelihood of a fast getaway. He was quickly enveloped in a sweetish, yet acrid and dense steam. Just as serious, a series of whizzes and pings told him he was being shot at. He wasn't

worried about small-arms fire damaging him or the helicopter at this range, but he knew now he wouldn't even have the element of surprise to assist him.

Illya reached into the cockpit and dragged out a metal tube about a yard long and a trigger mechanism that looked vaguely like a snub-nosed machine-pistol. Then he pulled out a canister and a weapon that looked very much like a snub-nosed machine-pistol—and in fact it was.

Then he dived for a clump of greenery as bullets whistled un comfortably near. He realized he'd underestimated their fire power. Somebody over there had a .50 caliber machinegun. He feared for the helicopter, but a slight shift of wind sent billows of smoke over his position. Now they were at an equal disadvantage—they couldn't see him and he couldn't see them.

Illya took the tube and trigger mechanism and fitted them together. They formed a one-man bazooka. He reached into the canister and withdrew a small but potent rocket and fitted it into the chamber. Then, slinging his machine-pistol over his shoulder and carrying the bazooka in one hand and the canister in the other, he scampered over the ridge until he was about seven hundred yards away.

He still could see nothing through the pall, but waited for a shift of wind which might momentarily reveal the layout and enable him to draw a bead accurately.

Everything seemed now to depend on a shift of the wind. Perversely, an hour went by before he got his chance, and when he did, he blew it. It wasn't so much a shift as simply a cessation. The steam rose straight up, disclosing the scaffolding directly behind some trees a hundred yards in front of the device. Illya could see a gun emplacement off to one side, and beyond it some helicopters and huts. He might have focused his aim on those, but the scaffolding was of primary importance, and he didn't know how much time he had left or whether the wind would ever give him another chance.

He set the crosshairs of the telescopic sight between the trunks of two trees and hoped to squeeze his shot between them. But as his finger closed

around the trigger the wind started up again and rolled the steam towards him.

He pulled the shot off hastily and the ground was rocked with one, then a second explosion. The first was Illya's bazooka, defoliating the clump of trees.

The second was Illya's helicopter. They'd hit the fuel tank.

As the wreckage rained about him he wondered what it would be like to be carried off to heaven on waves of molten lava.

Then he got angry and rushed another hundred yards closer to the target under the obscurity of the smoke. He loaded another charge into the bazooka and waited.

When the wind finally shifted, blowing the steam back over the camp site, Illya was greeted by a hail of machinegun fire that sent him rolling off into some brush. They had him pinned down and he couldn't poke his head up without getting it shot off.

FOUR

AT THE SHIFT of the wind Napoleon Solo and April Dancer moved as if launched by catapult. The steam curled over them like a gigantic white hand as they charged the guard with heads lowered. Napoleon's skull rammed his throat while April's struck his solar plexus.

The guard slammed against a tree, his head smacking violently against it, and he crumpled to earth soundlessly. April, hands behind her back, stooped and picked up the sub-machinegun and held it precariously, aiming it where she thought trouble might come from.

Napoleon Solo rushed for the generator hut, which was unguarded as Soong had sent all available manpower to the north side of the hill to try to get Illya Kuryakin.

The reed door of the hut gave easily, and Napoleon saw the throbbing generator, painted bright orange, at his feet. He turned his back to it and held his bonds away from his body, then started backing towards the whirring rubber fan belt. Delicately he placed the cords around his wrists against the belt, then pressed them harder and harder until the rubber whined on the cord.

The smell of burning fiber added its pungency to the foul odors coming from the volcano rig. Ten seconds passed, and then the cord frayed and snapped so suddenly Napoleon almost thrust his hands into the generator itself.

Hands free, he rushed outside, took the gun from April and ran back to the generator with her. He cut her bonds the same way, then ordered her to drag Dacian to a safe place. As she rushed out, Napoleon Solo trained his gun on the cables leading to the rig and fired.

The cables snapped and the hot ends, closest to the generator, began writhing like electric eels. He moved to the door and, trying to shield himself from ricocheting bullets, fired at the generator itself, cutting the fan belt and sending slugs into the machine's vital elements. It sputtered, faltered, and whirled to a stop, cutting off the electricity to Dacian's device.

He ran out of the hut in time to see April dragging Dr. Dacian into a clearing on the south side of the bill. From the opposite side he heard the chatter of machineguns. Cautiously he made his way to wards it until he could make out the shapes of half a dozen white- clad men training their fire on an outcropping.

Napoleon Solo automatically leveled his gun on them and raked their position with fire. Four of them slumped over their guns. One whirled around to confront Napoleon but was chopped down instantly. The last flung himself over his entrenchment and disappeared, presumably to seek a better position. '

A bullet winged close to Napoleon. It came from the helicopters.

Four men, of which Kae Soong was one, were rushing for the machines and spraying fire at Napoleon to cover their escape. He dived for the ground, and just as he did he was lifted bodily from the earth by the impact of a tremendous explosion, then slammed down again, his ears ringing.

All about Solo were falling hot pieces of metal. He rolled to his left under the truck that had carried him to the top of the hill. The truck echoed resoundingly as it was struck a dozen times by fragments from the explosion. Napoleon peered out and saw a mass of tangled rigging where the volcano box had been. Steam swirled around it, but it seemed to have diminished over its previous intensity.

Then he heard the whirling of helicopter motors. He rolled out from under the truck and swore. One of the THRUSH choppers was lifting off the ground. He raised his machinegun and fired, aiming for the pilot, but it faded quickly away from the hilltop.

The other chopper was waiting, rotors whirling, while a burly man, limping perceptibly, was assisted inside. It was Kae Soong. The man had either received a superficial leg wound during the late unpleasant ness or had sprained his ankle in the process of fleeing.

Without hope, Napoleon Solo trigger a blast at him, but the bullet-proof door had slammed closed. Already the whirlybird was leaving the ground in a swirl of dust.

Out of nowhere, he remembered what Waverly had once told him.

"Bringing down one of those with ground fire is an act of God, plus a lot of luck," Waverly had said. "But if you ever have to try, forget the men; aim for the base of the rotors. You've got one chance in maybe a thousand to hit it. But if you do, it's big casino."

For a moment the slanted angle of the copter's rise had the exact base of the rotors out of sight and by the time it had veered back again a lot of distance had come between them.

Grimly, Napoleon Solo sighted for the slim base and poured the last of his clip out into the empty air.

He was shaking his head in futile rage when he heard Illya's shout. What he saw made him tense, unbelieving.

Directly under the whirling rotors a spot of flame, no bigger than a tennis ball, had flowered. While he watched, it spread to the size of a soccer ball, turned bright scarlet.

Whoosh!

Like an evil flower, the entire machine was enveloped in that scarlet curtain. Through it Napoleon Solo could see the men inside leaping around in panic. And directly after that the world exploded, so violently that he could feel the concussion of the blast even at that distance.

The copter was no more. And of the men in it, scattered bits of clothing and worse were plummeting down through the flames.

Illya Kuryakin said, "I've seen worse shots, Deadeye."

Napoleon nodded. He felt very tired, very humble. Together they went across the plain to see what was left.

The four of them gaped into the still-steaming shaft. Then they walked to the other side of the hill and awaited the rescue copters, which Illya Kuryakin had called in on his communicator, to arrive.

Napoleon was grinning, but Illya looked dejected. "What's the matter?" he asked his Russian companion.

"Everything. That other copter got away and maybe with the formula. We're quite possibly worse off than before.

"Now it's not just Singapore. It's anywhere and everywhere. They'll be planting these devices like rice grains."

"No they won't," said Dr. Dacian weakly.

"Why not?" April Dancer asked.

"Because I gave them a false formula."

They sighed, then lay back and looked at the sun breaking through the steam-cloud over the hill. Suddenly April sat up, her eyes round with horror. "Oh gosh!"

"What is it?" they asked all at the same time.

"It's the end of the world!"

They looked at her gravely, as if they'd left out some vital factor in their considerations.

"I left poor Don Wirts watching that car," she exclaimed. "He must still be there. We must get to him right away."

They laughed, and turned their eyes south as the black specks of friendly helicopters materialized on the horizon.